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The Curse of Dangerfield.

+BY+

ELSIE SNOW.

NEW YORK:
NORMAN L. MUNRO, PUBLISHER,
24 & 26 VANDEWATER ST.

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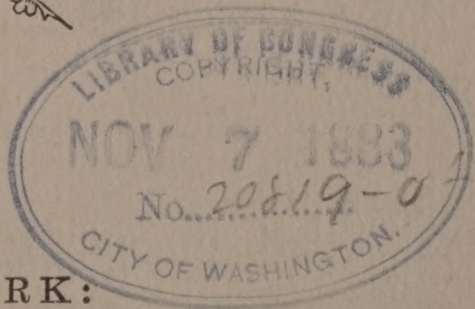
THE CURSE OF DANGERFIELD.

OR,

The Test of a Hundred Years.

By ELSIE SNOW.

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THE CURSE OF DANGERFIELD:

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By ELSIE SNOW.

CHAPTER I.

A FOREIGN LETTER.

THE family of Colonel Dangerfield consisted of three persons—Colonel Dangerfield, himself; Miss Helen Dangerfield, his daughter, and Edgar Dangerfield, his son, and heir to his decaying fortunes. The Dangerfield mansion was the oldest dwelling-house in eastern New York. It had been built when the American republic was in its earliest infancy, and there was a legend which prophesied its fall, and the total destruction of the Dangerfields, when the mansion house should reach its hundredth year. There were those of the family who listened and believed, and others who smiled and were incredulous. The present head of the house was one of the skeptical; but even Colonel Dangerfield could not shut his eyes to the troublesome fact that the fortunes of his family were at a very low ebb; and with a melancholy smile, he had once admitted that if the prophecy were to be taken figuratively instead of literally, he might yet join the ranks of those who believed in its fulfilment. It was a warm evening in spring; the French windows of the long, wide parlor were open on to the old-fashioned veranda, and the perfume of a very fine cigar floated out and mingled with the odors of spring that floated in from the garden; the silver crescent of a new moon shone through the branches of a tall elm, whose leaves were already preparing

to unfold in the warm, balmy air. Within the parlor was dark, but a murmur of voices that issued from it, as well as the fragrance of the cigar, informed you that it was not empty; and occasionally a girlish form stepped out on the veranda, and leaning over it, looked down into the garden, and then up at the glimmering moon, then walked two or three times from end to end of the veranda, and with an unconscious sigh, returned to obscurity. On the last occasion when she did so, her father seized her little hand, and playfully shook it.

“Now, my sweet, wandering spirit,” he said, “if you can be at rest for a few minutes, call for lights, and I will read you a letter that has arrived to-day from the fair Scot, Adelaide Urquhart.”

“A letter from Cousin Adelaide!—oh, papa! why didn't you say so sooner?”

“Well, I couldn't have done so much sooner, Nelly. I have only been home half an hour; besides, I have been thinking over it—the contents are interesting.”

“Oh, papa, dear, not another word till I come back,” and Miss Dangerfield flew from the room, returning almost instantly, bearing a pair of old-fashioned silver candlesticks, containing lighted wax candles. Colonel Dangerfield abhorred the light and smell of kerosene, and modern improvement in the form of gas had not penetrated to the Mansion House.

Miss Dangerfield placed the two candlesticks on a small reading-table which she carried over to her father, and having arranged the lights as she knew he liked to have them, sat down on an ottoman at his feet, crossed her slender hands on her knee, and looked up, ready to absorb the contents of the important letter.

Colonel Dangerfield slowly unfolded a perfumed sheet of note-paper, and allowed his gaze to wander leisurely over it from the date to the signature; and though Helen Dangerfield trembled with eagerness and curiosity, she knew right well that she dared not interrupt her father, or hasten him by a look or word.

She crossed her slender hands upon her lap, and bent her regards intently upon their delicate proportions, that she

might thereby be enabled to wait in peace and patience till her father should please to unclose his lips.

Very pretty she looked as she sat there, an image of restrained impatience—with fair, sweet face, long lashes dropped over violet eyes and resting on a round and blooming cheek. Her close-fitting dress of blue cashmere set off the girlish figure, and brought out the slight tint of gold in the light-brown hair. She looked like a good girl as well as a pretty one, and about the rosebud mouth there were lines of determination and will that would scarcely have been expected from her youth and girlish beauty.

Her brother surveyed her with lazy admiration, a smile about his lips and in his eyes as he gazed upon her. Edgar Dangerfield was regarded as a model of good looks by women—among whom his admirers were numerous. He had often been called a “beautiful man,” and the adjective was chosen advisedly, for he was “beautiful” rather than “handsome,” and although he was much admired by his own sex, too, it was in an artistic sense, and in terms used to describe a woman’s beauty rather than that of a man.

His resemblance to Helen was strong, but his beauty was much more remarkable; his hair, which was several shades lighter, clustered in short, silken curls about a head and brow that might have served as the model for an Adonis; his violet eyes were large, soft, and shaded by long, dark lashes, and his mouth was of almost child-like beauty, but it lacked the lines of firmness which could be traced about Helen’s—at times it looked petulant or scornful, and on rare occasions it wore a cold and cruel smile.

But it would have taken a skilful physiognomist to have declared Edgar Dangerfield’s character from his face. It was, indeed, but a partially developed character as yet, and would always depend much on circumstances for the shape and hue it might take. It lacked force and firmness, and possessed considerable kindness and some cowardice, which Edgar would have called conscience; a love of ease and comfort, often degenerating into absolute selfishness, was his predominant feeling up to his present age, and whether the influences that circumstances might bring to bear on his character might develop this selfishness into a

passion or wholly weed it out, could only be determined by time.

Briefly, taking into consideration his great good looks, his present tendencies, and the undeveloped state of his character, Edgar might be justly considered a very dangerous young man. He was not so considered, however, and his young sister, for one, thought him an angel; Edgar was feeling no great interest in his cousin's letter, but he began to tire of waiting for its contents; however, he dared not, any more than Helen, hasten his father, and to avoid any temptation to do so he arose, sauntered on to the veranda, threw away the end of his cigar, and having stretched his graceful limbs, sauntered back again, and dropped his elegant person into an easy chair.

"How handsome he is!" thought Helen, as she looked at him with loving and admiring eyes. "I wonder what Adelaide is like—she used to be a pretty little girl—and then such a fortune—if they only should—how nice it would be!"

A little sigh of longing escaped her, as she began already in her busy mind to weave a romance about her brother and the Scottish heiress. Colonel Dangerfield heard the sigh, and misconstruing its cause, he dropped his hand caressingly on the brown head beside his knee.

"I'll try your patience no longer, my little girl. Now, listen; the letter is dated over two weeks ago, and your cousin is probably arrived by this time; this is what she says:

"DEAR UNCLE AND COUSINS,—I shall be your guest for the Centennial. I don't wait to hear if I will be welcome, because I know that well enough. But don't tell any one that I am coming, and please don't let any one suspect that I am a great heiress—oh, how tired I am of being a great heiress! though I have enjoyed the doubtful felicity but a few months. I would keep it a secret from you, uncle, dear, and my cousins, if you didn't already know it. No, I wouldn't—forgive me for such a mean thought—but there, you see, that comes of being left a fortune so immense I don't know what to do with it! It has made me suspicious of even my best friends—but I believe in you, and always shall.

It is a comfort to know that there is always one household where I will always find myself loved just the same as when I was a homeless, friendless orphan, and where my faults will be disapproved of, my naughtiness rebuked, and myself loved just the same as if I were not Miss Urquhart, the great heiress. I am all ready to start, and my trunks are packed; but you needn't look for me until at least a week after you get my letter, for my maid has left me to get married—such a trivial reason—but all my arguments were powerless to overcome it, and, of course, as I am going to travel without chaperonage, I must have another one, and my passage is taken in the vessel which sails ten days later than the vessel which carries out this letter. Dear uncle, I anticipate such genuine pleasure in finding myself once more one of your family. What a dear little girl Helen was, and what a lovely boy Edgar used to be when we were all children together! What are they like now? Of course I must wait till I see them to have my question answered. Not for worlds would I undertake to tell you what I am like—indeed, for the past three months I have heard flattery enough to turn any woman's head. I used to think myself a pretty girl when I was poor and of no account, but I have imbibed such a wholesome dread of the worship paid at the shrine of wealth that I don't dare believe the one-tenth of the homage paid to me, and I have almost forgotten what I used to look like before I was an heiress. So don't let your expectations run too high for fear of disappointment; and whatever I may look like, take me for what I am, and that is, your own, and always loving niece.

“Dear Nelly—dear Edgar! I kiss you both, and long for the hour when I can feel your dear and loving arms about me!

“ADELAIDE.”

“The darling!” exclaimed Helen. “She writes just like the dear and affectionate creature she used to be.” †

“A charming and warm-hearted girl, evidently,” commented Colonel Dangerfield, as he folded up the letter, and returned it to his breast pocket.

“But what is all this she means about being a great heiress, father?” asked Edgar. “I didn't know that Ade-

laide had any money—poor child! When I last heard of her, she was governess to a couple of ill-behaved brats in a French nobleman's house. What has happened since?"

"It has happened to Adelaide to have a fortune of £500,000 sterling left to her."

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Edgar, with an exulting throb of the heart that subsided into disappointment, however, and it was with something of an effort that he suppressed a sigh, for he could not help thinking. "There was a fortune all ready to my hand, and certain, which a little effort might have enabled me to win, had I not made haste to barter freedom for one I may never gain possession of." But aloud, he said: "Why, this is news, indeed—how comes it that I never heard of it before?"

"Oh, it all happened, Edgar, when you were in Canada," said Helen, "and I did tell you all about it, too, in that letter you never received—the one that was stolen, you know, because it looked as if it had money in it. It was only my photograph—the thief must have been bitterly disappointed. I thought I had mentioned it afterwards, too, Edgar, but I suppose I forgot; and since you have been home, dear, I was too much interested in you to remember Adelaide's good fortune."

Helen glided from the ottoman at her father's feet, and sitting down beside her brother, slid her little hand into his. Edgar Dangerfield was very fond of his sister. She never crossed him in the least wish of his heart, and he knew that she loved him devotedly; he pressed her hand and smiled back into her sweet eyes. But he was suddenly interested in the fortunes of his cousin, though fate had put it out of his power to profit by them.

"Tell me all about this sudden wealth, Nelly, and how she came by it," he said, pursuing the subject.

"Well, in the French family where Adelaide taught those two unruly boys, there was a rich American grand uncle of great wealth, and from whom great things were expected in the way of money, but the eccentric creature chose to leave every dollar he possessed—a totally unincumbered fortune, invested in the Bank of England—to our Adelaide, simply because she nursed him through a very dangerous illness of

typhus fever, when his stupid relatives were either so frightened, or so heartless, that they were going to let him die.

“First he wanted to marry her, but she refused, and that seemed to please the old gentleman so much, besides proving that her kindness had been quite disinterested, that he made her his heiress, and then died as quickly as ever he could, that she might have the benefit of it.

“The family were furious at first; but when, in spite of everything they could do and say to the contrary, Adelaide really came into possession of the money, they turned around, male and female, to pay court to her; and all the marriageable young men have proposed to her.

“You can judge by the poor child’s letter how thoroughly disgusted she is with them—and I’m so glad she is coming—and just at this particular time! I wonder what she looks like? I’m wild to see her. Funny, she has never sent us her picture. Oh, Ned, if she should turn out to be hideous, won’t it be dreadful? because, of course, she’ll fall in love with *you*, dear, the minute she sees you.”

“Little goose!” laughed Edgar, pinching his sister’s cheek. “But I vow, this is the strangest story—quite a romance.”

“But you haven’t heard the strangest part of it, Edgar,” said Colonel Dangerfield, “and this is really remarkable. The gentleman who left Adelaide this fortune was named Francis Tulliver—the namesake, and only lineal descendant of the Francis Tulliver who was the old enemy of our house, and pronounced the curse on Dangerfield, which is now due in this, the Centennial year.”

“Papa!” exclaimed Helen, starting to her feet in astonishment, “is this really so?”

“Father, this is extraordinary,” said Edgar. “But are you quite sure, sir?”

“Yes. I have been at some pains to convince myself of it. But it is to be supposed that Mr. Tulliver did not know that he was enriching the daughter of Felicita Dangerfield when he made Adelaide Urquhart his heiress.”

Helen deserted her brother for her father, and once more settled herself on her ottoman.

“Now, dear papa—you know I love a story. Do tell me the Dangerfield legend, which I have never yet rightly heard; and all about this horrid Tulliver, and what did we ever do to him, and what made him curse our house?—wicked old wretch! and why was he our enemy?”

““Who says thy sex are curious?”” quoted Colonel Dangerfield. “My dear, you do remind me of another Helen. However, I will try to satisfy you. Once upon a time there was a traitor in our family——”

“Now, papa, a traitor Dangerfield! You know that is impossible.”

“Of course, my dear; but, somehow, it was unhappily true; and then, you know, it was a hundred years ago, and it is the penalty of old families to bear a blot on the 'scutcheon somewhere—so we had our traitor, and he was a very dark-complexioned one. Not satisfied with being a traitor to his country, he was also a traitor to his mistress, for he broke the heart of a lovely girl to whom he was engaged to be married; and her brother, Francis Tulliver, who called him out and was shot by him, cursed him with his dying breath, and prophesied the extinction of his name and house when, at the expiration of a century, another traitor should bring down the curse upon his head.”

“My goodness, what a miserable story!” said Helen, with a sigh. “I’m sorry I asked you to tell it, papa—but it is too ridiculous! Why, here are you and Edgar—the only men of our family that are left. Now look at Ned—does he look like a traitor? And for you—you dear, handsome old father—you could break a young lady’s heart, I am sure, if you wanted to, but you never would be so cruel, particularly when I am the young lady. And I shall be quite heart-broken, altogether smashed into little bits if I can’t go to New York to meet cousin Adelaide, and think we had better start to-morrow, Ned and I, because the steamer may arrive at any day now—for that letter was delayed, and very long on the way.”

“But, Nelly, you forget, I can’t go. It is absolutely necessary that I should return to Montreal this week. Business demands it.”

“Business must wait on pleasure for once, Ned; and I’m

sure it would be neither nice, nor cousinly, nor hospitable, if you should run away in that manner when Adelaide is expected any day or any hour—wouldn't it look strange, papa?"

"Well, Edgar, if you could strain a point—of course I don't mean to come between you and your interests—but if you could remain a few days to join in your cousin's welcome, I would be pleased."

"Very well, sir, since you wish it."

Edgar was glad to have himself overruled in the matter, for although he was sincere in his wish to return to Canada as soon as possible, the evening's conversation had awakened in him a desire to see his cousin, Miss Urquhart. Helen flew to her brother to kiss and thank him for his consent; and then having administered a playful hug to her father, she declared it was time to say "good-night," as she must overhaul her wardrobe, and pack a small trunk for her journey on the morrow.

CHAPTER II.

RETROSPECTIVE.

THREE months before the opening of this story, Edgar Dangerfield had been offered a position of trust by a business friend in Montreal, of such a nature that it promised to be at the same time lucrative, and such as the representative of the Dangerfields might accept without lessening his dignity. Edgar accepted it, for he felt himself quite unfitted to fill the *role* of impoverished gentleman.

His luxurious tastes and selfish love of ease made it a necessity that he should achieve, if not fortune, at least competence; so that to avoid future privation, he spurred himself to a present effort.

The novelty of having something to do proved attractive at first; and before it had worn off, Edgar had discovered, or Fate had thrown in his way, a means of assuring his fortunes. The case of a very curious will was being contested, and the Montreal papers were full of it; the subject was discussed in all circles—at the breakfast-table, at dinner, in the clubs; and Dangerfield heard enough of it to awaken

considerable interest in his mind—always on the alert for a possible means of bettering his fortunes.

By this will a young girl, then living at service, was left heiress to a handsome fortune upon condition that she proved herself the testator's grand-daughter, which was solemnly declared by him to be the case, although he could leave no written proofs of the fact. There were heirs-at-law, and of course the will was warmly opposed by them, on the ground of the testator's alleged insanity; and proofs of her identity, and of her relationship to the dead man, which were produced by Elise Morel, were declared by her opponents to be forgeries.

A lawyer was found, however, who declared Miss Morel's case a good one; and who, in the language of the younger Weller, seemed disposed to work it up "on spec." Of course Elise had many adherents, and some of them influential ones; her story was too romantic not to make friends for her; and it was in the drawing-room of a magnate of fashion that Edgar Dangerfield made the acquaintance of the prospective heiress.

The girl was a little beauty in her way, and he was attracted by the dark, piquante face before he learned who she was, and upon entering into conversation with her, he found there was nothing unrefined or even *gauche* about her, notwithstanding the humble position she had all her life been accustomed to.

Edgar Dangerfield had all the pride of old family and tradition, and under ordinary circumstances would not have condescended to know whether a servant's hair were black or red; but before he had talked a half hour with Elise Morel, he had made up his mind to marry her. The girl was no longer a servant; society had taken her up—she was the fashion; and a clever lawyer gave it as his opinion that she was heiress to a handsome fortune, and would undoubtedly win her case.

Elise looked upon Edgar Dangerfield, and in that first look, as Elaine when she looked on Launcelot, the dark-eyed little serving-maid "lifted up her eyes and loved him, with that love that was her doom." She was not Elaine, nor like her; far less was Dangerfield like Launcelot; yet Elise's sud-

den, complete and passionate love for him was fated to have as tragic an ending.

Edgar was accustomed to easy conquests, and for that reason he generally held them lightly; he had never had an easier conquest than now, and yet he valued the love of this young girl—at least for the time—more than he had ever before valued any woman's affection; and he told himself, with a glow of proud satisfaction, that his feelings were not merely mercenary, and though he valued the wealth which was so necessary a portion of Elise's attractions, he appreciated the girl, too, and would make her the best and tenderest of husbands.

The wooing was so easy and so rapid it does not need description. Before Edgar had known Elise a fortnight, the happy girl had promised to become his wife, and had agreed to a marriage as secret and as private as he could wish. In his desire for a secret marriage, Edgar Dangerfield's motives were of a mixed character.

In the first place, Elise was not yet a declared heiress; and until she was so, he shrank from acknowledging her as his wife. Then she was almost totally uneducated, and he was determined that she should have masters of every kind necessary to make her an accomplished and educated woman of the world; and as a matter of course, this had to be done in private, for the small vanity of his nature could not endure to have it said that the wife of a Dangerfield was receiving instruction in the ordinary branches of education.

Elise Morel suddenly disappeared; and those who would have said that she had eloped with Edgar Dangerfield—whose attentions were open and undisguised—found their lips were closed by the fact that he had not disappeared, but was to be seen, as usual, attending to his business during the day, and in the usual places of resort in the evening.

There was a buzz of astonishment over this new phase in the Morel case; and the opponents of Elise congratulated themselves, and declared that she had found her position untenable, and had given it up.

But Mr. McGrath continued his efforts with undiminished energy in the cause of his client; for to him alone Elise had

written, promising to keep him informed of her movements, and urging him to carry on the case. To secure his undivided attention she enclosed a goodly fee, furnished by Edgar; and Lawyer McGrath worked like a mole, diligently and in the dark, and to the consternation of his opponents, he won the case, and Elise was declared sole heiress to her grandfather's estate and wealth.

The termination of the case made considerable stir, as any one who was in Canada a few months ago will remember; and the disappearance of Elise became a topic of wild and exciting interest. Scores of stories were set afloat to account for it, and there were those who even went so far as to accuse her opponents—the heirs-at-law—of having made away with her.

Edgar Dangerfield, it is unnecessary to say, did not share in the popular excitement; but he felt that it was no longer necessary to be so careful regarding his movements; so he left Montreal and sought the abode of his concealed bride, and for the first time tongues wagged connecting his name and that of Elise together, and many wise heads were shaken, and declared to each other that they had suspected how it was all along.

But Edgar was calmly indifferent—although he knew that his departure, following so directly on the successful termination of the Morel law-suit, was calculated to arouse precisely such suspicions as it did arouse. He was burdened with only one anxiety in the world, and that was how to present his young wife to his father; for the one creature in the world of whom Edgar stood in awe was Colonel Dangerfield, the stately, dignified old gentleman, who had brought his manners down from a former age, and knew how to make them respected even by the present one. Edgar was much perplexed, and he even went so far as to take Elise into his confidence—to a limited extent.

“You see, my dear, unsophisticated little girl, we are such very grand people; and I don't quite see my way to telling the governor just yet, and if I declare our marriage, as you wish, of course it will become public immediately—he will hear of it at once, and I might just as well write to

him now and own up to everything before he hears it from some one else."

"But, Edgar, dear, won't the money make any difference?—there's such a great heap of it—and I do hear them say that money will do anything in this world, if you have enough of it."

Dangerfield looked into the piquante, child-like face, and smiled at the *naive*, artless words and manner.

"There is much truth in that, Elise, my darling—the trouble in this case is, that I fear there isn't enough money in the Dominion of Canada to cancel, in my father's mind, the degrading fact that his only son has married a——"

"A servant!" burst out Elise, flushing to the roots of her dark hair, while tears dimmed the luster of her large brown eyes, and rained in a sudden shower over her cheeks.

"Now, my little thunder cloud, I really must forbid this," said Edgar, playfully, but in reality, really provoked. "You are not a servant, Elise, I was not going to use the word, and I wish you to forget all the disagreeable past, as I shall do. There is very little trace either in your appearance or manner of your having ever occupied any position less dignified than you now do, which is enough for any lady—my dear little wife, isn't it? You have improved wonderfully, pet—you sing like a canary-bird—you read charmingly, and I am quite proud of your handwriting, and I have a right to be, as I formed it myself. Now, dry your sweet eyes, and let me see nothing but smiles on a face that was meant only for sunshine."

Elise obeyed literally; and in a few moments her fresh young face sparkled with joy. She nestled into her husband's arms, and put her blooming cheek against his blonde mustache with the caressing fondness of a child; and presently she said, in a sweet, low voice:

"I will do just as you say, always, dear Edgar; but I was only going to suggest that it might be a good thing for you to speak of me to your father—let him hear my name—accustom him to the idea of me; and then, by and by, when I have learned to be a lady, and have quite forgotten that I ever was anything else, you can tell him that I'm quite an heiress, and that you are going to marry me."

“Your suggestion is a very good one, Elise, and I don’t think I can do better than act upon it—now, little one, what are the tears for now?—an April day is no comparison to you.”

“Ah, Edgar, you speak so easily of leaving me again—and you have only come!—You don’t know how I pine and long for you when you are gone!”

“Don’t I?—You would not think so if you judged my heart by your own. But reflect, my sweet girl, that my absence now is to gain the privilege of being always with you.”

“Yes, Edgar, I will do that, and that thought alone can comfort me.”

So it was finally agreed between Elise and Edgar Dangerfield that their marriage should still be kept secret for a short time—that the inheritance should for the same period remain unclaimed publicly, although her lawyer was acquainted with her whereabouts—and that she should continue diligently the pursuit of knowledge while Edgar was taking means to break the true state of affairs to his unsuspecting father.

On the part of Elise there were many tears and a tender leave-taking when she bade her husband adieu; and Edgar, who, like many selfish and heartless men, could not endure to see a woman weep, was affected by the girl’s clinging fondness and perfect, trusting affection.

He kissed the little wet face again and again till smiles shone through the tears, and Elise felt it was almost worth the pain of parting to be so loved and petted.

Edgar had promised to return within a fortnight, and now nearly three weeks were gone, and he had not yet broached the subject of his marriage, and felt that he was as far from doing so as on the first day when he returned from Canada.

But when, after hearing his cousin’s letter read, he retired to his room, he felt that he must brace himself to the effort, and take the consequences, whatever they might be.

Colonel Dangerfield was no match-maker; but Edgar could not be blind to the self-evident truth that his father would look with delight on the chance of the heiress falling in love with her handsome cousin; and as for Helen, her sen-

timents were already declared, and Edgar clearly perceived that the darling wish of her heart was to arrange a marriage between himself and Miss Urquhart.

“I must tell Helen about Elise,” he said to himself, half aloud, as he drew from his pocket a letter which he had that day received. He carefully snuffed his candle, trimmed the wick, and unfolded the letter.

“Dear little Elise!” he exclaimed, looking at the round, school girl hand which directed it. “You may not be so rich and you may not be so learned as our great heiress, but a sweeter little woman doesn’t live, and you are as fresh and pretty as a rose.”

He unfolded the letter and read it carefully, for on first receiving it he had merely glanced over it.

“MY HUSBAND.—Dear—dearest Edgar, I write that first because I am so lonely; and when I say the words and see them written on the paper before me, it is—oh! you cannot think what a comfort it is to me! It seems to bring you so near me, dear, that I can almost see you and hear your voice. My husband—my husband, my very own, something that belongs to me, and that no one can ever take away from me—oh, my! it is like a dream, only I know it is real.

“But you who have always been loved, and have had always your own to love, can scarcely know what it is to me to have some one to pour out my whole heart upon, for till I knew you, dearest, I was so lonely—my poor heart often ached for something to lavish itself upon.

“I wonder if you would laugh, Edgar, if I should tell you the pets I used to make when I was quite a little girl! In the family where I lived there were no children, unhappily for me, because I would have worshipped them if there had been.

“My master and mistress (oh, dear! you must forgive me, Edgar—I didn’t mean to say that, and I never will any more) I mean the lady and gentleman who were never unkind to me—quite the contrary—they were good and gentle, but in such a way as I can’t describe, though I felt what it meant, for it seemed to me that I mustn’t love them—that it would be too great a liberty, and then, you know, I couldn’t. But we had a great Angora cat, and I loved that; and

we had a dear little skye terrier, and I loved that; but oh, most of all, I loved a little marble bust of Byron that stood in a niche in the stairway! I didn't know it was Byron then—I didn't care, either, who it was, but I was glad it was beautiful—for I always loved beautiful things, and I suppose that is why I loved you, darling, from the moment when I first saw you.

“Yesterday I took down that lovely volume of poems by Lord Byron that you gave me; you remember you told me all about him, Edgar, and I have remembered every word, and what a great poet he was, and I have read the ones you told me to—*Childe Harold* and *Manfred*, and the *English Bards*.

“They're awfully clever, but I don't altogether understand them, but I suppose I shall get more intellectual when my mental faculties are more developed—that's what you say, you know, and I do hope it's true. I liked *Manfred* best—was that right? I'm not quite sure—I think you said *Childe Harold* was the greatest of them all.

“When I had read for ever so many hours I looked at the pictures. A few months ago I would have looked at the pictures first, and I don't think I would have done much reading. I think that picture with the name of Haidee under it is sweet. You told me not to read that poem; so of course I won't; but I think the picture of the girl is just lovely; and I do so want you to come home, and read me all about it.

“At last I turned to the front of the book, and there was a picture of Lord Byron himself, and oh, Edgar! it was my Byron—the little bust that I loved so much, and used to make such a pet of, and love so, and now—well, you may be sure I shall love it more than ever now, and there won't be a lady in all your fashionable society who will know half as much Byron as your little Elise.

“But let me tell you how I came to make such a pet of Byron's bust. I was a very little girl, Edgar—now don't laugh nor be angry with me—and I never had had a doll; so, to fill the void in my heart, I used to borrow that little bust every night when I went to bed, and dress it up in part of my own clothes, and put a little shawl around it, and then

I used to take it in my arms, and sleep the sleep of the blessed.

“I was down stairs early in the morning and put it safe back again before it was missed, so I never was found out. You may judge from this how my heart cried out for something to love; and then, darling, you may have some idea, perhaps, what it is to me to have you to love—you, my husband, my own forever, the most beautiful of all the men in the world, more beautiful even than the real, living Byron!

“Oh, Edgar—Edgar! don’t stay away from me much longer—come to me soon, my husband, or my heart will break! I get your letters, dearest. They are more precious to me than anything on earth, except yourself; but still they are not you, and that is not their only fault.

“You said two weeks, dearest, and now it is two weeks, and more, and then you don’t even tell me when to expect you. Have you told your father about me? Will he have me for his daughter? If you will only come back to me, I think I wouldn’t care.

“You may keep our marriage secret forever, if you will only come! Do come, Edgar, darling! do—do come. If you don’t, I may do something desperate. *I may come to you!* You don’t know how much I am sometimes tempted to do so, and brave even your anger for the sake of being with you——”

Edgar bounded from his chair as he read the last line, for at the same moment the front door bell of the Dangerfield mansion pealed loudly, again and again; and in a few moments he heard hurried footsteps issue from several rooms and hasten along the passage-ways.

A shiver passed over him, and he sank into his seat with a thrill of apprehension, and almost of fear.

“Can it be Elise?” he muttered. “She would not be mad enough to put her wild, childish threat into execution! I could not forgive her!”

CHAPTER III.

ADELAIDE.

EDGAR DANGERFIELD listened for a moment, alarmed and anxious; and when the bell again rang out, he opened his

door and went into the hall. He would have descended with the intention of reaching the door first, and so be the first to meet the new comer, in case his fears should be realized; but his sister, whom he met at the head of the stairs, detained him.

“What in the world has happened, Edgar?” she cried, “is the house on fire? or is any one dying, I wonder? I never heard such an uproar at our door before.”

“It is some late arrival, or some one who has lost his way, and mistaken the house,” Edgar answered, assuming a composure he did not feel.

“Some late arrival, Edgar—how you talk! Are we so much in the way of having arrivals at any time, that one should come at such an unheard of hour? *Who* could it be?”

“It might, by chance, be our Scotch cousin,” said Edgar, hazarding the first thought that came to him.

“Edgar, you are angel!” exclaimed Helen. “Of course it is Adelaide—I was so occupied in getting ready to go and meet her, that I quite forgot she might come along at any minute. And, oh, do see the state I am in! I was just going to undress for bed—I must go and make myself fit to be seen.”

Helen ran back to her room, and Edgar felt himself somewhat reassured by his own suggestion. He still remained on the stair-landing, for it was now too late to reach the door before the servants; and all he could do for the present was to listen, and ascertain whether there was any present occasion for him to exercise his natural powers of dissimulation. He heard the chain withdrawn, the heavy key turned in the massive lock, and the door opened; and then he heard a deep, rich voice, musical as a flute, ask the servant if “Colonel Dangerfield was at home.”

Edgar gave a sigh of relief—the voice was not that of Elise; it was far more high-bred and delicately toned, but he didn't think of that then—he was simply thankful for a reprieve, and he returned to his room.

Colonel Dangerfield was still in the parlor; he was the only one of the family who had not yet retired; and on

hearing himself asked for, he came forward, and met his guest as she entered.

“Uncle, dear uncle!” the new comer called out, “I would have known you in the deserts of Arabia. You are not the least bit changed, you are the same dear, darling uncle who used to take me on his knee and kiss away my childish griefs. Aren’t you going to kiss me now?”

Miss Urquhart was instantly clasped in Colonel Dangerfield’s arms, and her question was satisfactorily and repeatedly answered.

“Helen—Edgar!” called the delighted old gentleman. “It is your cousin—it is Adelaide! Come down stairs, quick! Have you gone to bed? are you both asleep? Rouse yourselves! Nelly, I’m astonished—you to be so slow! Come—come—come!”

“Oh, you dear, impetuous papa. I’m not such a laggard as you would make me out. I’m coming. I will be there in a moment. But don’t eat her up—keep a little bit for me. Oh, I hear you kissing her, and I’m awfully jealous already.”

Helen ran to her brother’s door, knocked on it, and without waiting for permission, burst into the room. Edgar was carelessly puffing a cigar, and idly glancing over an open letter. At his sister’s entrance he crushed the letter in his hand, thrust it into his breast-pocket, and looked at her inquiringly.

“Edgar, whatever are you thinking of; aren’t you coming down-stairs? Why, it is cousin Adelaide, as you said, and there you sit, as composed as if she were at the moon. You are the most provoking fellow!”

“Must I go down to-night?” was the languid reply. “Where’s the use? I’m sure to-morrow will do as well.”

“Edgar, you know you don’t mean it—it would be an unpardonable slight. Our own cousin, and our guest—it would be an outrage upon common politeness.”

“Well—well, Nelly dear, don’t cry. I’ll come, of course, if the matter is of so much importance.”

“That’s a darling, and I know you meant to come all the time. Your cravat’s untied—wait a moment. There, you’re as handsome as Apollo, and if you weren’t as good

as an angel, your silly sister would make you as vain as a peacock."

Edgar indulged in the quiet, superior smile characteristic of his sex; for in his heart he quite believed himself worthy of all his sister's loving adoration, and there were few things in the world that gave him so sincere and pure a pleasure as Helen's undisguised and honest admiration. She slipped her hand within his arm, and the brother and sister descended the stairs together.

Although but five minutes had passed since Miss Urquhart's arrival, Colonel Dangerfield had made good use of the time, and already the house was illuminated in her honor. Every candle in the silver candelabra of the parlor—never used except on state occasions—was lighted, and when Helen and Edgar entered they were half blinded by the sudden light, and wholly dazzled by the splendid beauty of the woman who stood awaiting them, in the middle of the parlor, and directly under the blaze of a dozen wax candles.

Helen recovered speedily enough to find herself the next instant in her cousin's arms, and to welcome her with all the affectionate exuberance of her nature; but Edgar's manner seemed, to his sister, cold and formal, although it neither chilled nor offended his cousin.

Edgar Dangerfield felt bewildered—stunned; and he withdrew into the farther part of the room, that he might, in the comparative obscurity, satisfy himself with gazing.

Women like Adelaide Urquhart are like the flower of the aloe—they bloom but once in a century. Her beauty was of the kind to dazzle the eye and satisfy the soul, but utterly beyond the power of words to paint. Raphael might have put its radiant splendor upon canvas, and Titian might have caught its wondrous coloring; but the glory that seemed to radiate from her, like some subtle perfume, was beyond even the touch of genius to secure and hold. Penetrating as the odor of Indian spices, it was equally impalpable, and must have been felt to be understood. For the rest, she was tall, slight, perfectly proportioned, and indescribably elegant and graceful in all her movements. Her face was of the complete oval that is so

rare as to be almost an ideal of feminine beauty; the delicate chin melted softly into the snowy throat; the cheek was round and full, and mantling with a color as indicative of health as of beauty; the mouth was a perfect bow in shape, the lips firm and bright-hued, and disclosing rows of pearl when she laughed. Her nose was straight and of the Grecian type; her brows delicately but clearly defined; her forehead rather broad, and not very low, and her dark brown, rippling hair was drawn back and fastened at the base of the head in a style to be recognized only by those who have seen the *Venus di Medici*. Of course the eyes were the special beauty of her face, as they must always be of any beautiful woman's. Hers were large, dark hazel, soft and lustrous, flashing with merriment, melting with tenderness, sparkling with archness, darkening and flaming with anger, and looking out from a fringe of long, black, silken lashes. She was dressed with perfect simplicity, but in a manner calculated to enhance her extraordinary loveliness; her costume was like the silver setting of the diamond that is not seen because of the luster of the jewel. Miss Urquhart's robe was a traveling dress of heavy, dead-black silk, close-fitting, without trimming of any kind, except ruffles of lace at the wrists and throat.

In looking at his Cousin Adelaide, Edgar Dangerfield did not tell himself that she was the fairest woman he had ever seen—he thought of no other woman—he didn't remember ever to have seen any other woman. At once he felt as if there was but one woman in the world, she who now sat before him, and who now and then sent a swift, thrilling glance in his direction. He looked and looked, and never turned away his gaze, but seemed to grow intoxicated on her beauty. He heard the rippling music of her voice, but he scarcely listened to what she said; no doubt it was divine, whatever it was, but just then he cared little for the substance of her words, so long as he heard the flute-like tones of her voice. In reality, Adelaide was talking of the ordinary and, in some ways, prosaic, events of her journey and arrival in New York; and describing with some humor, and more indignation, the desertion of her waiting-maid as soon as they were fairly on *terra firma*.

“But you didn’t make the journey all alone?” asked Helen.

“I didn’t make the voyage alone, for, as I told you in my letter—did you get it? Well, as I said I would, I had to wait till I suited myself with a waiting-maid. Since I’ve been rich I have been foolish enough to become quite dependent on those creatures, and of course I couldn’t undertake the journey across the Atlantic alone. But I found a maid sooner than I expected, and came on a vessel that started a week earlier than the one I had first intended to sail in—besides which, we made one of the quickest passages on record.

My maid was a pretty, blue-eyed Irish girl, who had been many years in France, and spoke the foreign language better than her own, so that I congratulated myself on having found a treasure; for she had the traditional beauties of the pretty Irish girl—lovely eyes and complexion, and magnificent hair, and all the trained neatness and good taste of a Frenchwoman. Well, with much reluctance my fair Norah consented to trust herself to the briny deep, and for a handsome consideration, and her passage paid, promised to be ready to sail next day, and so she was, with a promptness that quite delighted me, as promising so well for the future. She was quite a companion on the voyage, made herself so useful that I could cry now to have lost her, and learned the knack of dressing my hair to absolute perfection. Well, we were no sooner landed than the base thing dropped me a courtesy, hoped I wouldn’t be angry or very much disappointed, because she was obliged, much against her wish, to quit my service; her husband would not allow her to live out any longer.”

“Your *husband*, child?” I cried, in amazement, “you have no husband. You told me especially that you were a single girl when I engaged you.”

“And so I was, ma’am, but you see Terry O’Neil, a boy I used to know at home in Ireland, found me out on the passage—he’s one of the sailors on board the ship we came on, miss—and what with the surprise, and not having seen each other for so long, and being among strangers, the talk of the old times made us that lonely that I cried, and Terry

kissed me, and said the only way for us to be comfortable in each other's society was to be made man an' wife, so then whenever I felt bad, he could have the right to kiss me, an' that would comfort me, so I wouldn't mind being among strangers one bit. Och, he has the persuasive tongue, Terry has, and what with listening to him, and me cryin' now and thin, and him kissin' the tears away, we just went to the priest this mornin' and he married us."

Adelaide's listeners laughed heartily, and even Edgar joined in the merriment, for in describing her maid's desertion of her, Miss Urquhart mimicked the Irish brogue and manner of delivery in a style to have done credit to a comedian.

"So there went my third *femme-de-chambre!*" concluded the beauty, with a little shrug of her graceful shoulders, and a comic grimace, which gave an expression of archness to her lovely face that was quite irresistible. "I suppose I must have another one, but there are two things in waiting-maids I have resolutely set my face against—I will not have a pretty one, and I will not have one who speaks French.

"Oh, please, dear Adelaide," pleaded Helen, "have none—at least for the present. Let me be your waiting-maid, and you will see that what I lack in skill I will make up in love."

"You darling child! you shall wait on your wayward cousin till you tire of her, and I'm afraid that won't be so long as you now think. Nelly, good fortune, and certain disappointments which it has been the means of bringing me, has made me sadly suspicious and capricious."

"Oh, yes, I perceive clearly that you are a terrible creature," Helen returned, with a look of love and admiration. "Nevertheless, I will undertake the care of you."

"Then, my dear," said Colonel Dangerfield, "you had better begin by ordering supper for her. You know she left New York a little after noon, and, of course, she has had nothing fit to eat since."

Helen vanished, all the housekeeper stirred within her, and superintended the preparation of cold chicken, a delicious salad, and one or two dainties which she remem-

bered her cousin used to have a preference for in childhood, and then, with her own careful hands, she brought from the cellar a couple of bottles of Colonel Dangerfield's choicest champagne.

Adelaide turned toward Edgar, and looked steadily at him for a few moments before she spoke.

"Cousin Edgar, you are greatly changed," she said; "I would not have known you anywhere else than at home."

"I was but eight years old when you last saw me," returned Edgar. "Seventeen years do wonders in the way of change."

Edgar came out from the obscurity where he had buried himself, and took a chair close by his cousin. With all his strength of self-command, he struggled to speak and act as usual; and with great effort he concealed the embarrassment which overpowered him in the presence of his beautiful cousin. But he knew that every pulse in his body thrilled to the delicious music of her voice, and his heart beat almost audibly when she turned her glowing eyes upon him. Edgar felt, without understanding his own sensations, that he was the victim of one of those overwhelming passions of love at first sight that at times, but very rarely, occur to men of his sensuous and selfish character—such a passion as may make a man a hero, by developing the germs of all the good within his nature, or may make him a villain, if it appeals to the seeds of evil in his soul. Already Edgar trembled, and was afraid at thoughts which had beset him since he had seen his cousin; and despite his utmost efforts, his manner had not the ease and grace natural to it. But Adelaide did not misunderstand the embarrassment which seemed like coldness and lack of cousinly affection in Helen's eyes. In her brief experience as a great heiress, Miss Urquhart had seen the passion of love simulated; nobles and princes, whose hearts were worn out and incapable of genuine love, had knelt at her feet, but Adelaide was not to be deceived. But in her experience as a beauty—which had been much longer—she had seen the real passion of love, and pitied it, and refused it; for as yet Adelaide had never loved. But now something stirred at the bottom of her heart, quickening its throbs, and

sending a warm, delightful thrill throughout her being. She was quick to note the effect she had produced on Edgar; experience had made her an adept in feeling pulses—other people's!—and she knew that her cousin loved her.

“How handsome he is!” she thought, as they continued to talk, murmuring commonplaces to each other, but gazing deep into each other's eyes. “How very handsome he is! I wonder if the real man is as fine a creature as the outside looks to be. Ah! if he is as noble and grand as he looks, I think I could love my cousin Edgar, and that would be so nice for all of us.”

A slight, unconscious sigh escaped her lips; they ceased speaking, but continued looking into each other's beautiful faces, till a slight blush mantled the cheek of Adelaide, and to Edgar the silence was growing oppressive.

“Supper! good people—come to supper!” cried Helen, running like a romp into the room, and seizing her brother's arm. Colonel Dangerfield took Adelaide, and his eyes rested on her with all a father's love and pride, and with a deep tenderness that carried him back into the far past, for in her he beheld the beautiful sister of his youth, who had died years before the first snows had fallen on his head.

It was almost morning when Helen bade her cousin “good night” and left the tired girl to sleep; and in passing by Edgar's room she saw by the light shining through the keyhole that he was not yet gone to bed. She tapped on the door and entered. Edgar sat by the open window, gazing out on the sky. Helen flung her arms around his neck in her usual impulsive way, and whispered:

“Oh, Edgar! isn't she the loveliest woman you ever saw?”

“Are there other women?” he answered, dreamily. “I don't remember them.”

Helen laughed delightedly.

“You dearest duck of a fellow! Is that invulnerable heart of yours carried captive at last? And like the best and most obedient of brothers, you will carry her off before all competitors, and make her my own sister, in very truth!”

“Oh, leave me, dear Nelly, and go to bed,” said Edgar,

in a drearily despondent tone. "I wish I had never seen her—I wish I was dead!"

"Don't be ridiculous, Edgar—there's no occasion for such despair! Of course she is pre-eminent among women—beyond compare; but so are you, as a man. Be cheerful—be hopeful—remember, 'faint heart never won fair lady'—Adelaide will marry you—I know she will. There isn't a woman in the world whom you couldn't make love you. But there! I'll tease you no more—I see that you are tired and sleepy. Good night!"

As the door closed upon his sister, Edgar Dangerfield uttered a heavy, sad sigh; he pressed his hand against his heart, and as he did so, he felt the letter he had thrust into his pocket some hours before. He drew it forth, and smoothed the rumpled paper. It was the tender, loving letter from Elise, his wife—the letter which only a few hours ago he had read with answering tenderness, seeming to see the writer's sweet, childish face as he read her words. He glanced hurriedly over it now; and a flush of mingled shame and anger arose to his forehead. How common—how vulgar—how low seemed every line in it as he now took them in with a flashing, haughty glance, and a lip curling with scorn.

"And she is my wife!" he muttered, "my wife! A serving maid, a low, uneducated girl, who has been at the beck and call of mistress and master—compelled to brush their shoes when they have commanded her! And I am tied to her for life! Oh, fool—fool! Insensate idiot—I have ruined my life, played with my happiness, wasted my heart—thrown myself away for a mere shadow; when, if I had had patience, wealth, grace, refinement, and such beauty as never before was seen, were all coming straight to my arms!"

With impotent rage he tore Elise's letter in pieces, and trod the fragments under his foot. He then, with sudden calmness, collected every little piece, and carefully burned them all in the grate.

"It is a homely proverb," said the handsome heir of Dangerfield, "but I must test its truth, I fear, for as I have made my bed, so must I lie on it."

Edgar dropped the extinguisher on his candle, and then, dressed as he was, flung himself on to a lounge, where, contrary to his expectations, he soon fell asleep, and did not awaken till the day was far advanced.

CHAPTER IV.

LOVE'S YOUNG DREAM.

No man ever became a hardened villain at a single step, and although Edgar Dangerfield awoke with undiminished admiration for his cousin, and a sore heart that he could never hope to win her, there was in his feelings a sudden reaction in favor of Elise.

“Poor child!” he thought, almost tenderly, “she loves me better than her own soul—and it would be far worse than death for her to know that I valued her love no more—worse, that it is an incumbrance—an incubus upon me. I must try to remember that! And as for this beautiful siren who has come to us, I must close my eyes and my heart to her charms, and as soon as good manners will permit, I shall bid her an eternal adieu, and return to the lonely little girl that waits and pines for me.”

With these thoughts occupying his mind Edgar proceeded to make a careful and elaborate toilet, and he felt as well satisfied with himself for the noble and self-sacrificing motives that were actuating him in his proposed course of conduct that, for the time, he felt most happy, and entirely heroic. He did not see that his feelings of intended self-martyrdom would continue but a ridiculously short time.

Edgar descended to breakfast, and he found Adelaide alone in the dining-room. Helen was superintending the morning meal, and Colonel Dangerfield was in the garden. The beautiful girl came forward and greeted him with all the warmth and absence of ceremony warranted by their relationship as cousins.

“My dear Ned,” she said, with a brilliant smile, “you look as grave as Disraeli over the question of the queen’s new title—what is the matter? It can’t be that you slept badly—your eyes are too bright, and your complexion too clear, and you are too young and healthy to have dys-

pepsia, even in New England. Come, now, cast that shadow from your brow—or at least tell me the grief which has thrown it there.”

Edgar still held the velvet-like slender hand which his cousin had given him in the morning greeting, and the touch of it made his pulses dance, and the warm blood rush to his cheek. Unconsciously he pressed the delicate fingers, and continued to hold them in his clasp. Adelaide was even more beautiful by the morning light than she had been on the night before, and Edgar felt all his good resolutions melt away in the sun of her loveliness like the last drops of dew before the heat of noonday.

“I am sad,” he answered her, “because my time is up—my visit home is at an end, and I must return to Canada in a day or two, at furthest.”

“Return to Canada? What in the world do you mean? Why must you return, Edgar?”

“Because business compels me. Do you, then, not know that I have fallen to the common level in so far that I must earn that which I wish to enjoy?”

“And if you have, Edgar, I am proud to know that you do it—but, still, the heir of Dangerfield talking of ‘business,’ and ‘being compelled,’ and ‘leave of absence’—it sounds strange.”

“Heir of Dangerfield, my fair cousin, is but an empty title; and I am very thankful for the ability to earn something to fill the void,” said Edgar, with a fine look of resignation and conscious dignity, which Miss Urquhart thought noble.

“You are a dear, splendid fellow, and I am proud of you!” she exclaimed, with enthusiasm. “But important as business may be, you must stay a few days longer, dear Ned—it would be really shabby to run away so soon after my arrival. Why, I should think you were afraid of me!”

“And so I am—terribly!” Edgar returned, flashing a look so direct and full of meaning into her eyes that Adelaide blushed like a rose.

“Decidedly a charming and most gallant cousin,” she thought. “But there’s no need, Edgar, you won’t find me at all dreadful, I do assure you. I never do anything very

awful, and you must stay for one more week; won't you? You cannot refuse my first request."

"I'm afraid there is nothing I could refuse that you might choose to ask for, Adelaide," returned Edgar, in a low, almost trembling voice. He half raised her hand to his lips, but drew it within his arm instead, as he led her toward the breakfast table; and Elise was again quite forgotten.

"Then that is settled!" Miss Urquhart exclaimed, gayly, turning to Helen and Colonel Dangerfield, who entered at the same moment.

"Do you know this naughty fellow was actually talking of leaving us to-morrow?" she said, "but I have conquered his obduracy, and he graciously consents to remain a week longer."

Helen shot a quick, triumphant glance toward her father—in her mind everything was already settled; and when she received a good-natured smile in return for her look of intelligence, she nodded her little head to signify her entire satisfaction with the prospect before her.

Edgar remained for the promised week, and when it was completed, he still lingered, nor spoke of going.

It was evident enough to the most ordinary observer that he was quite subjugated by his cousin's extraordinary beauty. He was, in truth, madly in love with her; and more than once he had forced himself out of her presence only in time to save himself from putting his passion into words. Elise was forgotten—at times absolutely, for Edgar even forgot her very existence, when he was in Adelaide's company; and when remembered, it was only to be hated, cursed, loathed, in terms worse, even, than utter forgetfulness. But even in his most ardent moments Edgar dared not forget the fact that he was a married man; it was fear of his cousin which kept alive that remembrance, however—not any feeling of pity or last, lingering tenderness toward his absent wife. Edgar Dangerfield knew that marriage with his cousin was impossible; and therefore to speak to her of love would be hopeless madness. He could not expect to keep the true state of affairs forever a secret. Adelaide must sooner or later learn that he was no longer

free; and then, understanding how he loved her—for surely she could not be blind to the fact—she might pity and love him for what he now suffered. But tell her now—put into words his wild and frantic passion—he dared not! He knew that if he did so she would despise and hate him when she learned the truth. Not all the fervor, not all the despair of his love, would be sufficient then to excuse him for giving it utterance. Edgar judged his cousin correctly in this estimate of her character; but it cost him tortures to abide by his enforced resolution. Another letter came from Elise. With a curse Edgar destroyed it, unread. “I must go!” he muttered. “It is only prolonging the agony of death to remain here longer. I must—I will go to-morrow.”

The gong sounded for dinner, and Edgar went down stairs. He sat opposite Adelaide, and his wife’s letter was forgotten—his wife’s existence was blotted from his memory.

A few days went by, during which, as Elise received no answer to her letters, she telegraphed to her husband. The telegram was delivered to Edgar as he sat at breakfast, neglecting his rolls and poached eggs, while he watched the varying expression of his lovely cousin’s face, and made absent replies to the lively rattle of her conversation. Adelaide Urquhart was not a profoundly intellectual woman, nor a brilliant talker; yet she possessed the faculty of always interesting her listener, and whatever she said seemed bright, and even witty, from her manner of saying it. It was the great and indescribable charm of her own individuality which gave a charm to her lightest word or look.

When he received the telegram, he felt the nature of its contents even before he opened it; and his cousin and sister were quick to observe his change of color and evident disturbance while he read it.

“I will start for Dangerfield at noon to-day, unless I receive an answer to this, for I shall know that you are either ill or dead.

ELISE.”

“I hope it is nothing serious, Edgar?” Helen and Adelaide said, speaking almost together.

“Only a peremptory reminder that my leave of absence is long over. Well, it is quite just. I have behaved badly—I will bid you all ‘good-by,’ to-morrow morning. For the present, I must beg to be excused, as it is absolutely necessary to send an immediate reply to this message.”

“But, Edgar, dear, one of the servants will carry your answer to the office.”

“No, Helen, I must attend to it myself.”

Helen offered no farther suggestion—she saw that Edgar was in a mood that would not bear contradiction, and he left the room without another word.

But Helen was determined that he should not leave them entirely without first hearing her speak her mind on what, to her, seemed his inexplicable conduct toward Adelaide. She watched for his return, and waylaid him as he entered the house.

“Now, Edgar,” she began, playfully, “you cannot escape me, so you may as well yield with a good grace. I must have some conversation with you, privately—come into the library.”

Edgar obeyed in silence. He guessed the purport of his sister’s conversation, and resolved to have it over. Helen turned the key in the door, when they both entered the library, and so secured herself from intrusion.

“Now, then, Edgar, you are going away from us,” she began.

“You know, my sweet sister, that I must do so.”

“No, I don’t—if you chose to behave as a man in the possession of his reason. Don’t go—you know there is no necessity.”

“What do you mean, my dear? You know there is an absolute necessity.”

“You know perfectly what I mean, Edgar; but since you affect not understand me, let me put my meaning in the plainest possible words: Adelaide loves you, and would be your wife to-morrow, if you would but ask her, and then you need never be at the beck and call of any business, however money-making and important.”

Edgar felt his face flush with triumphant joy when Helen said that Adelaide loved him. He had often hoped so; but

it gave him indescribable delight to hear it so confidently stated, and by one who was not likely to be mistaken. In answer to Helen's words, he only shook his head, however, and he could not repress a long, deep sigh.

"You needn't sigh in that absurd manner—I tell you I know she loves you," persisted Helen. "Much you have to sigh for, indeed. The handsomest woman in the whole world and a magnificent fortune waiting for your acceptance. I don't understand you, Edgar—and they won't wait forever, you must remember."

"My dear, these are purely mercenary considerations," returned Edgar, affecting gayety.

"Is it, then, possible that you don't love Adelaide?" asked his sister, in alarm.

"Helen, I adore her!" was the impassioned reply.

"Then why in Heaven's name don't you tell her so?"

"Because I dare not."

"Edgar, there is something in all this beyond my power of guessing at—ah, deceiver! You are keeping a secret from me."

"A terrible secret, dear Helen—but I will tell you! Yes, I think it will relieve me to do so."

Edgar Dangerfield seated himself, for hitherto he had been standing; and for some moments he leaned his head upon his hand in thoughtful silence. Upon the very point of confiding his whole secret to Helen he stopped; for it seemed like putting a final and irrevocable barrier between himself and Adelaide—he could not do it. A single sentence from Elise's letter came to his mind with the suddenness of a lightning flash—if he would only return to her. She had said she would not care if he never acknowledged their marriage! Not yet would he reveal his own bondage—he would not commit himself by any statement. Something might happen—something must happen—he would wait and see. He looked up at Helen, the whole expression of his face changed, and she saw in an instant, that her chance of winning his confidence was gone.

"Helen, there are reasons, honorable reasons, why I cannot at present urge my love on Adelaide. But I will return soon, and then——"

“And then she will have been to Philadelphia, and all the world will have seen her, and then you will be too late, Edgar, that is all,” Helen said, bursting into tears of disappointment.

“No, dear, I will trust to my clever little sister to save me from that misfortune,” said Edgar, kissing her tear-wet cheek. “Surely Adelaide knows that I love her.”

“If she doesn’t know it *soon*, it won’t be my fault,” thought this clever little sister; and she was clever, too, for a woman—she knew when she had said enough, and closing her resolute lips, she spoke not another word.

Helen’s was not the only feminine mind in the Dangerfield mansion that wondered exceedingly why Edgar didn’t speak. The beautiful heiress, herself, was not a little troubled by Edgar’s extraordinary behavior. Adelaide was in love with her cousin—not at all to the same extent as he was with her; but enough to be willing to surrender herself into his keeping. His treatment of her was so entirely unlike what she had been accustomed to from other men that her vanity and curiosity were both piqued, and she was all the more ready to marry him, because he seemed determined not to ask her.

“Does he love me?” she asked herself. “Surely he does—if I ever read love in a man’s eyes I have read it a hundred times in Edgar’s. Does he not love me? then why does he linger here instead of going away? Is he afraid to speak? Is it this detestable fortune, again, that stands between me and a true love? He knows I have spurned fortune-hunters, and he fears to be thought one of them. Noble fellow! Dearest Edgar! but he shall speak—he shall know that I love him, if I have to speak first and tell him so! Before we part he shall understand that the only value I set on this troublesome money is the pleasure it will give me to surrender every pound of it into his hands.”

From dwelling on them, the most impossible things at last begin to look like probability, and from the instant it had dawned on Edgar that a means of freeing himself from Elise was possible, the idea had never left his mind. Many a time he had wished she was dead, but he had not yet thought that such a means of freedom could be compassed

—nor did he, even now. His dark and cruel thoughts of her had not yet taken any definite form; but he felt that freedom was possible—how, he knew not, but it would come—it must come!

His heart glowed with the passionate love he could no longer control; and Adelaide must have been blind, indeed, if she failed to read it in his eyes, in every burning look, in every low and faltering tone of his voice:

“Cousin,” she said, as they arose from table, after dinner, taking Edgar’s arm as she spoke, “come with me for a walk in the garden. There is lovely moonlight, and I claim you all to myself for this last evening.”

They passed out together, Edgar only pausing to throw a shawl over his arm, while he remarked that “spring was lazy, and the evenings still very cold.”

It was a lovely moonlight night, as Adelaide had said, and the soft splendor of its rays fell on a couple whom nature had formed in a mood when she was lavish of perfection, and who certainly looked as if they had been intended for each other. Although Adelaide was tall, above the ordinary height of woman, Edgar was several inches taller, and she had to look up into his face as she leaned upon his arm, and murmured in his ear, in a voice sweet as the sound of running water in the summer woods.

“Will you be very long away, Edgar,” she asked.

“But a few weeks, I hope, if my business in going is prosperous. Will you care to have me return soon?”

“What a question. We shall all miss you, but I, most of all.”

“You, why?”

“Because I may not see you again. Such things happen, you know. No one can feel sure of the future. You may not return for months, and by that time I shall have returned to Europe, and we may never meet again.”

“Adelaide!”

“Edgar!”

The temptation was very great—she was so beautiful, and he could feel the beating of her heart against the arm she held pressed to her side; her great, dark eyes looked up into his, her balmy breath was on his face, her lovely mouth

trembled like a grieved child's about to cry; and then all at once they were clasped in each other's arms, their lips pressed together, and their very hearts almost stilled in the hush of that first long, passionate kiss.

“Adelaide, my angel, my own, say that you love me!”

“Edgar, darling, you know that I love you!”

CHAPTER V.

ELISE.

EDGAR left Dangerfield at an early hour on the following morning. He had taken leave of Adelaide the previous night, and he was at some pains to see her again. They had parted as betrothed lovers, and at the time it had seemed to Edgar the simplest and most natural thing in the world that they should do so. But in the cold morning light, no longer under the influence of the moonbeams and his fair cousin's intoxicating beauty, he trembled to remember what he had done. When he was fairly on board of the train, and found himself being carried rapidly, hour by hour, away from Adelaide, instead of regretting the fact, it was a sort of positive ease and comfort to him. He could consider calmly his position, and give up his mind entirely to working out some plan by which he might rid himself of an encumbrance, and become possessed of the heiress and her money—the latter, to do him justice, far less ardently desired than the former. As the train sped forward, Edgar became utterly absorbed in plans for getting rid of Elise; the only means that suggested itself to his mind was to dissolve his marriage, but that was evidently impossible. How, or on what grounds, even if the girl would consent—and he knew well that she would never do so. Suppose he were to tell her that his father was implacable—absolutely unforgiving in regard to his marriage, and beg her by her love for him to allow him a divorce? He knew that Elise would rather die than yield to such a request, even from him; but supposing her scruples could be overcome—he might make it a matter of life and death—worse obstacles stood in the way. They had been married by a priest, for Elise was a Roman Catholic, and in that church, divorce is a matter requiring the Pope's sanction.

“I see no way out of it!” thought Edgar, winding up his reflections in despair. “Why did I ever see her? Selfish little creature! If she had really loved me, she would have refused to marry me. She ought to have foreseen that it would bring me nothing but misery. Confound her—curse the hour when I was mad enough to tie myself to her—I wish she was dead!”

With his whole heart Edgar Dangerfield wished his wife either dead or forever out of his way, but “murder” is an ugly word, and so far he had not spoken it, even in his thoughts; however, before he reached Montreal, he had made up his mind that neither Elise Morel, nor twenty such, should stand in his way. Such a woman as Adelaide was worth a thousand chits of girls—a broken heart! Let her heart break—many good people managed to be very comfortable, notwithstanding a broken heart. And why should not her heart break, indeed! If hers didn’t, his would, and to Edgar Dangerfield this was a sufficiently convincing argument. His spirits arose. He went to his hotel, dressed for dinner, and met a friend—a young man somewhat of his own stamp, but lacking the good looks which made Edgar so popular, and made the people he met so unsuspecting of his real character.

“Hallo, Allan!” cried out Edgar, cheerily. “You are the very fellow I would most have wished to meet. Can’t you leave town for a few days? I am going on to Toronto to-night, and I’d be delighted to have your company. Come, won’t you?”

“Why, what’s the inducement—beyond your own company, which is considerable, of course?”

“Then you should be content, nor ask for more. However, you’re a greedy fellow—always expecting more than you deserve. Come with me, and I’ll show you the hiding-place of a pretty little girl, and one whose reappearance would make a sensation now.”

“What the deuce do you mean, Dangerfield? Oh, by Jove! I twig. You did carry off the Morel heiress, then, after all. You are a sly dog!”

“Don’t cry it on the house-tops, there’s a good fellow. All that I tell you is in confidence.”

"Trust to me, old fellow—I'm blind and deaf in matters of this sort. Only tell me one thing—have you married her?"

"Don't be too inquisitive," was the careless reply.

"She's quite an heiress, now, you know—the money is a sure thing. It might be worth a man's while to marry her, if he was in want of cash."

"Then sail in and take your own chance," laughed Dangerfield.

"Thanks!" returned Allan, with a significant shrug that raised his shoulders almost to his ears. "First come, first served—I'd be sorry to step in the way of a friend in such a speculation as that."

Edgar whistled an air from *La Belle Helene*, and dropped the subject. He had said quite enough to make the first step easy in the course he had decided on regarding Elise.

"I shall be with you by twelve o'clock to-morrow night—have some supper prepared. EDGAR."

That was the message which the heir of Dangerfield had sent to his young wife.

Elise read it over and over again, as if her loving eyes must have detected some tender message beneath the careless words.

"How cold it seems!" she thought. "Not one kind word—but how silly I am! He could not tell me he loved me by telegraph!"

And she tried to laugh, but the sound of tears was in her merriment. She did not doubt her husband's love; but she had wondered and wept over the fact that he had not written to her now for three weeks. She took out all the letters she had ever received from him—five; and read them once more, although she already knew every word by heart. They were tolerably fair love-letters; but to Elise they seemed the choicest specimens of penmanship that were ever penned, nor did she observe the significant fact that she was not addressed as the writer's "wife" in any one of them. To Elise they were entirely satisfactory; in her loyal heart there was no suspicion; and the sole thought that troubled her was:

"Poor, dear Edgar! What trouble he must have been in

not to have found time to write to me in all these dreary weeks. Ah, dear! I'm afraid he has failed with his father, and such grand folks won't have poor little me for a relative. But I don't care—I will love him all the more—he shall have more love from me than father, sister, or all the world besides could give him, and then, perhaps, he won't care so very much.

“Sally—Sally, come here—don't forget that the master will be home to-night, and that everything is to be made ready.”

A neat-handed, slender little servant—not unlike her mistress in general appearance—appeared in answer to the call for Sally, and it must be owned that the young Mrs. Dangerfield felt a trifle awkward in her presence, and was often confused in giving her orders. However, she was getting rapidly in practice, and on the present occasion did very well, for her thoughts were too much occupied with her expected lord to be very conscious of anything else. She gave Sally various orders; and when the obedient little maid had departed to obey them, the pretty little mistress flitted about her house from room to room, carefully inspecting everything, to be sure that nothing was wanting in the order and neatness which she knew Edgar prized as something important. She was a charming and careful little housekeeper, and found very little to offend her eye.

It was a pretty little house—just suited to such a pretty little mistress.

It was a small, two-story white cottage, just on the suburb of the upper part of the city, and from her chamber window Elise could look down on the whole city, and see, afar off, the waters of Lake Ontario sparkling in the afternoon sunset.

Generally, she loved to sit there for hours at a time, reading the books that Edgar wished her to become familiar with, and now and then glancing off the page to look at the distant glinting water.

She had no visitors, nor did she care for any, so she never wondered why her neighbors never called on her, and she was far from guessing that she was looked upon with sus-

picion, even by the grocer and butcher who supplied her table.

Sally knew, for she had often been plied with questions; but she was a discreet handmaiden, and had held her tongue. If she had any suspicions in the dim recesses of her own mind, she had wisely kept them there, and never hinted them even to herself, further than to wonder, occasionally, "where missus kep' her marriage lines."

Sally felt, sometimes, that just for the satisfaction of her conscience, she would like to see them—not that she could have read them if they had been that moment spread out beneath her eyes. But Sally had a firm conviction that about "marriage lines" there must be something so peculiar and unmistakable that even a blind man could tell them from any other kind of "lines."

Much as Elise liked to sit by her window and look down toward the lake, she soon tired of it now; for she was too restless and too preoccupied to be at peace anywhere.

So she flitted about from room to room, and finally took up her post in the dining-room, where she could superintend the table and give directions for the cooking going forward in the kitchen.

It was now long after nightfall, the shutters were closed, the curtains drawn, and, as the evening was very cold, fires were burning brightly in all the grates.

Elise felt that it was as cheerful, cozy, and altogether comfortable a home as any fond husband could wish to come to; and with a sigh of satisfaction, she retired to her own room to make ready for his arrival.

Since her marriage the matter of dressing had become an affair of great importance to Elise.

She had a closet full of pretty dresses; but she was a very long time in selecting the one to be worn. It must be one that Edgar liked—that was of the first importance, and then it must be the most becoming of any she possessed, of course. Two were selected, both of which Edgar had been pleased to praise highly when she first wore them.

The next question was to choose between them which was the most becoming? The blue silk was cut square on the neck, and with her locket and velvet ribbon, she knew

was quite charming, but it had long sleeves, and so concealed the prettiest pair of arms that were ever hidden from admiring eyes.

The amber-colored silk had an overdress of black lace caught up with scarlet poppies; it was made with a low corsage and short sleeves.

The first time she ever wore it had been at a dinner party, and Edgar was there, and he whispered in her ear that she looked "like a little princess." Elise remembered with a blush and a thrill of delight, and the blue silk was tossed aside in contempt, for, of course, the amber silk was the dress for to-night.

Never since she had worn a fine dress had Elise spent so much time over her toilet; but when it was completed she felt that the result quite justified the pains she had taken. Elise was a pure brunette; her skin of a clear, dark olive, with a color as rich as carnation on cheeks and lips.

Her eyes were large and very dark, so that with her jetty brows and lashes they looked quite black; and her hair was of the hue so often likened to the raven's wing, but in her case the comparison was just.

It was smooth and glossy as satin, very abundant, and worn in heavy braids fastened with a silver comb.

Her figure, though slight and small, was a model of girlish beauty, and her bare neck and arms were like polished ivory.

Her dress enhanced her beauty, and her natural grace of movement enabled her to carry off the elegance of her costume as one who had always worn such. While she stood before the mirror, in the light of two carefully placed lamps, criticizing her appearance, and very well pleased with it, she heard the sounds of an approaching carriage, that in another moment stopped before the door. Elise flew downstairs, feeling that, like Mercury, she had wings to her feet, only she knew nothing about Mercury. But she reached the door before Sally, which was the principal thing, tore it open, and flung herself into Dangerfield's arms.

"Oh, Edgar, my darling! you have come at last! I thought you would never—never come—but you shall

never leave me again, love—indeed you never shall—promise me, Edgar, never to go away again.”

“My dear, I have a friend with me,” said Edgar, slightly touching his lips to her cheek, and extricating himself from her embrace. “Let me introduce him, and don’t be so exuberant in the presence of strangers.”

Elise almost staggered back into the hall, she was so amazed and disappointed. Tears sprang to her eyes, but she drove them back again, for she knew how Edgar hated a scene—but, oh! how cold he was after so long an absence—he had scarcely kissed her, and he had hurt her hands in loosening himself so quickly from her embrace. It was cruel—cruel! The presence of a hundred strangers could not excuse it.

Dangerfield, accompanied by Allan, followed Elise into the dining-room.

“My dear,” Edgar said, taking the girl’s hand, “let me present to you my friend, Mr. Allan—Allan, this is Miss Morel—that is, ah—I should say, Mrs. Dangerfield.”

The correction was made with a half laugh, and although Elise did not understand the insult of the stranger’s prolonged stare and the exaggerated politeness of his bow, she felt that there was a want of respect in both, and her manner made her as stately and dignified as the wife of any Dangerfield could have been. Edgar observed this, but not with pleasure. Her dignity and self-possession provoked him.

“Why are you dressed in that style?” he asked in a low, imperative tone. “You know I don’t care to have your arms and shoulders exhibited to strangers.”

“Dear Edgar!” returned Elise, in an equally low tone, although she could scarcely command her voice, “how could I know that you would bring a stranger to-night, the first time I have seen you for so long. But, since I don’t please you, I can change the dress—shall I, dearest?”

“Oh, no, never mind, the dress will do, and you look well enough. Come, Allan, I will show you your room, while supper is being served. Elise, I am very glad you have fires—it was quite thoughtful of you.”

He turned toward her, and smiled as he spoke, and the

girl loved him so dearly, she was grateful for very little. Even that slight praise, although it was no more than might have been bestowed on a servant, made her glad, and she went cheerfully to tell Sally to serve the supper.

It was a delicious meal, for Elise had been to great trouble to study Edgar's tastes; and no one in the world knew so well just what dishes he preferred, and how he liked to have them prepared, and which were his favorite wines.

Dangerfield was sufficient of a gourmand to thaw perceptibly beneath the pleasures of the table; and Elise soon perceived that, though for some unaccountable reason, he was dissatisfied with herself, he was certainly pleased with the supper she had prepared. But the circumstance afforded her but slight pleasure.

"Why is he angry with me?" was her constant thought. "What have I done to offend him?—he scarcely looks at me, and that strange gentleman stares at me all the time. How very rude he is!"

Elise was one of the few women to whom restrained grief and anger are not unbecoming—on the contrary, the unshed tears that now softened her sparkling eyes, and the pent-up emotion which deepened the bloom of her cheek to a vivid crimson, but served to increase her beauty; and as he continued to look at her, there was more of genuine admiration than of rudeness in Allan's prolonged looks, which so offended the object of them.

After a while, Edgar, too, bent his gaze upon her, and beneath those eyes, which softened and smiled upon her, the poor child thrilled with delight, and soon beamed with happiness, for the man she adored was gentle and sweet to her as he used to be—his voice was low and tender, and more than once he murmured a lover's whisper in her ear.

"She's distractingly pretty," thought Dangerfield, as he filled his glass with champagne—which he had already done half a dozen times. "Confound the luck! If I had never seen Adelaide I could be quite comfortable with this girl to adore me! I'm sure she loves me twice as well as that magnificent northern beauty, and I suppose that's why I prefer the other one."

The *other one* not being there, although Edgar Danger-

field was as madly in love as when he parted with her, he was too much a man of the present moment to neglect its opportunities; and the present moment was Elise.

As he had declared to himself, "She was distractingly pretty," and he gave himself up to a complete enjoyment of her beauty, while calmly following out in his mind the means by which he meant, in the basest and cruelest manner, to rid himself forever of all that stood between him and marriage with Miss Urquhart.

While he sat at supper, and too conspicuously admired his hostess, Allan had wondered more than once whether Elise was Dangerfield's wife.

"She's a beautiful girl, and looks a born lady," the young man said, in his thoughts. "She's good enough for any man's wife. Dangerfield is a scoundrel if he isn't married to her—but without doubt he is, though he treats her cavalierly. There's too much authority in his manner for any thing less than the husband."

As supper progressed and Edgar showed an evident admiration for his pretty wife, and became quite devoted in his attentions, Mr. Allan changed his mind.

"Oh, by Jove!" thought this astute youth, who considered himself quite a man of the world. "He is evidently not married to her—he is entirely too much the lover here to be anything more as yet—the fool! The girl worships him, and he'll never find a truer wife."

CHAPTER VI.

THE WAY OUT.

PLACED in a somewhat peculiar and altogether uncomfortable position, Edgar Dangerfield found himself subject to all the fluctuations of feeling which beset a man whose movements are not regulated by principle. On the first evening of his return to Elise, seeing her so pretty and observing his friend's undisguised admiration for her, he was half in love with her; but on the next day everything she did dissatisfied him. His passion for Adelaide returned with redoubled force, as if to punish him for having, even for a moment, forgotten her.

The slight provincial accent in his wife's voice irritated him beyond endurance, when he remembered the refined, high-bred tones of Miss Urquhart; he contrasted the superb elegance of the latter, her slow, yet light and graceful movements, with the neat little figure darting to and fro like a kitten, but always intent on contributing in some way to his comfort. The evening was fresh, light, and springlike; and Edgar sat by the open window, enjoying the invariable solace of his cigar. But apparently it afforded him less than the usual satisfaction, for he tossed it out of the window, and exclaimed, in a tone of vexation:

“Elise, for Heaven's sake, stay in one place for a minute at a time. Your perpetual movement fidgets me to death—come here! I have many serious things to say to you, and I want to say them now, while we are alone. Allan has gone to have a look at the city, to prove its inferiority to Montreal, I suppose. He will be back to dinner, however.”

Elise came, like a good little wife, and took the little rocker alongside of Edgar's chair. It was some time before he spoke; and she didn't care to break the silence. Already Edgar was changed toward her, and no longer the fond lover he had seemed for awhile on the night before. She felt that she was to hear painful things, and she did nothing to hasten the saying of them.

“That childish threat of yours to come to Dangerfield unless I returned to you at once was a very foolish threat, Elise,” Edgar said, speaking at last.

“I was half wild with alarm, Edgar, at not hearing from you. I thought you must be dead, or very—very ill, when you were such a long time without writing to me. And why were you so cruel as to keep me in suspense?”

“Absurd! You had no reason to think such nonsense—if anything had been the matter with me I would have let you know, of course. I was waiting my opportunity to tell the governor of my marriage, and your absurd nonsense spoiled everything. Lucky you didn't come, little simpleton, you would have ruined me if you had.”

“Why, Edgar, have you told your father nothing, then?”

“Not a word, and probably never shall.”

“Oh, Edgar!”

“Now, Elise, you know I can't stand tears; and a fit of hysterics, such as you seem disposed to favor me with, would upset me completely. Do be a good, sensible little girl.”

Elise bravely choked back her tears, and smiled—a smile more pitiful than tears.

“Edgar, I would do anything in the world for you, you know I would. What am I to do so that you will think me a ‘good, sensible little girl?’”

“You are to be very patient, and wait till I think the proper time for our marriage to be made public has come—and you must never again disturb me with threats of what you will do if I don't seem to be in as great haste to return to you as you may think necessary.”

“I will try, Edgar—I will try to be very good and patient; and to care less for you than I really do—ah, that will be hard indeed—but since you wish it, I will try.”

“That's my own, good little girl,” and he took her hand, and passed his arm caressingly over the back of her chair. “But you are so impulsive, Elise, such an excitable little kitten, that I know you can't promise for yourself how you may feel when I am away. I must have some proof of your good intentions.”

“What must I do, then? Surely you can ask nothing that I will refuse you?”

“Have you the certificate of our marriage safe, darling?”

“What a question, Edgar!”

Elise started up with a proud smile, and running to her dressing-case, brought from it a small ebony box, which she opened with a tiny key, worn on a velvet ribbon about her neck.

“There, darling,” she said, taking out a folded paper—
“Is not that safe?”

“Apparently, quite safe, my love. But still I think I can take better care of it. You must let me have it, Elise.”

“Let you have my marriage certificate? Oh, Edgar!”

“I hope you do not doubt me, Mrs. Dangerfield,” he returned coldly, and with his grandest manner.

“How could I doubt you, Edgar, or of what could I sus-

pect you—but surely a wife has the best right to the certificate of her marriage, in case it is ever required. If you wish to say that you are my husband, no one will doubt it, Edgar—but if I were to say that I was your wife, who would believe me in case I hadn't the proof of it?"

"You foolish child! it is to save you from the temptation of saying so that I want you to give me the care of this troublesome paper—but there, put it away again, since you cannot trust me."

Elise slowly returned the paper to the box, but her eyes questioned him, appealingly.

"Edgar, you know it breaks my heart to have you speak to me like that—you might, at least, give me some good reason for wishing to have the 'lines.'"

"And so I will, sweetheart, the best of reasons—it is that you may not be tempted to precipitate matters by telling my father that you are my wife—if you didn't possess the proof of it there would be no danger of your doing so; but if you were to betray our secret now, Elise, as I have already told you, you would ruin everything."

"Why *now*, Edgar—you have said 'now' two or three times—is there any reason why it is less prudent to tell your father of our marriage, now, than when you left me for the express purpose of breaking it to him?"

"There is a reason, my darling—a reason worth £500,000. My father has set his heart on my marriage with a great heiress, and to tell him at this unfortunate time that I am already married—surely you can foresee the effect! He would never forgive me, far less acknowledge you, and I could not endure my father's life-long anger, Elise, even for your sake, you little witch."

Elise had grown very pale while Edgar spoke, and when he paused, she asked, in a scarcely audible voice:

"Who is she, Edgar?—this heiress?"

"My own cousin, Miss Urquhart."

"Is she pretty?"

"No," answered Edgar, dreamily, and with a half smile, as the image of Adelaide rose before him. "She is not pretty—she is the beauty of the world—the fairest woman that was ever seen."

The little box Elise was holding closed with a crash, and the key was fiercely turned in the lock, and then wrenched out and hidden in her bosom. Edgar looked up with amazement, and could have bitten his own tongue with rage for the words he had uttered. He was thunderstruck by the effect upon his wife. She had started to her feet, and stood confronting him with flashing eyes and flaming cheeks, her whole face distorted with jealousy.

"You love her!" she cried, in a low, but distinct and thrilling voice. "You shall *never* have my marriage certificate. You love this fine lady with her grand fortune, and you would rob me to make her your wife. Oh, Edgar—Edgar—Edgar!" and her sudden passion dissolved in passionate tears.

"The devil take my clumsiness!" thought Edgar. "Idiot that I am to have made such a blunder—she will never give me the infernal paper now. But I must have it, and a fine time I'm going to have of it. I wish to Heaven I could see some way out of this tangle."

He arose and sauntered about the room, carelessly whistling, and not deigning a reply to Elise. Nothing he could have said or done could have been more effective for his purpose. Protestations or coaxing would have produced little effect upon the girl's disturbed mood--his apparent indifference calmed her almost immediately. She stole softly to his side, and slipped her hand within his arm.

"Edgar," she whispered, "dear Edgar--say I was mistaken. Tell me you would not be so cruel."

"If I were to tell you not to behave like a madwoman it would be more to the purpose. What possessed you to take such an insane notion into your silly little head?"

"Don't be angry, darling. I think I would soon go mad, indeed, if you loved me no more. But you do, Edgar, say that you do."

Edgar stooped and kissed her two or three times

"There, you foolish child, will that do? Go and lock your precious box away where I can never find it, and then bathe your eyes. There comes Allan, and it is just dinner time."

Edgar sauntered to the window and looked out, but not-

withstanding his affected carelessness, he took particular notice where Elise placed the ebony box, and as they went in together to dinner he observed that the velvet ribbon from which the key depended was tied in an ordinary running knot. At the same moment he remembered that Elise slept as sound as a tired infant, and might be kidnapped in her sleep without stirring an eyelash.

Never since their wedding day had Edgar seemed more lover-like than he was during that evening. It seemed his wish to blot out from her memory every unkind or cold word he had ever spoken, and Elise blamed herself bitterly for her cruel suspicions, while she overflowed with love and gratitude for his tenderness. Indeed, had Edgar asked for her marriage-lines again, it is doubtful if she would have refused him; but he didn't, nor even referred to them in any way, and Elise, half ashamed of the passion she had been betrayed into, was glad to dismiss the whole disagreeable subject.

On the next morning, at breakfast, Edgar said:

“We are going to desert you to-day, my love. Allan declares he must return to Montreal to-morrow, and as I have business in Trafalgar about some surveying, I intend to have it over to-day while I have a companion. I suppose we can get a couple of horses at the livery stable, and as it's a twenty-mile ride, good-by, little woman, for we've no time to spare. Don't expect us till you see us, but we shall be home some time of the night before daylight.”

He turned and kissed her, on her brow and cheek, with a sudden glow of the superficial kindness which often made him seem so gentle and winning; for, though he could do most cruel things, he was too cowardly to look on them when done.

He had done something very cruel to Elise, but he parted from her with a kiss—the last she ever received in this world, though she was far from thinking or suspecting it at the time; but stood looking after him with tender love filling her heart.

Allan raised his hat with marked respect, for although he was still not quite clear as to the relationship of Dangerfield

and Elise, the girl's manner had impressed him, and he treated her as he would have treated any other lady.

Elise ran up-stairs to her room, thinking how badly she had behaved the evening before, and hating herself for a thought that had obtruded itself into her mind two or three times during the morning.

"I will first convince myself," she said, aloud, "how base and unworthy the suspicion is, and then I will do penance for having admitted it, even for an instant, in my thoughts."

She took out the ebony box, hastily unlocked it, and put her hand into it. But the box was empty—the certificate of marriage was gone.

Elise sank on the floor with a groan of agony that seemed to tear her soul and body apart.

"He has taken it!" she cried, "he has stolen it! Oh, God! and this is the man I have loved! He loves this other woman, and to marry her he will ruin me."

A rage of disappointment and jealous fury swept over her. Had Edgar been present, she was capable of killing him in the first torrent of passion. But a sudden calm came over her—she arose, and called her servant in a quick, imperious manner, not usual with her, and the girl came wondering.

"Sally," she said, quietly, "go and bring a cab from the nearest stand—there is one on Church street or Yonge street, close by. Don't delay a moment—I am in haste!"

The girl obeyed silently, and Elise hurriedly packed a few articles in a small traveling-bag; she then changed her dress for a black silk traveling suit, tied a thick dark veil over her hat, and stood ready at the front door when the cab drove up.

"Now, Sally," she said, giving the girl a bunch of keys, "if your master returns, say that I will be home to-morrow—but probably I will get back before he comes; and not a word to a living soul about my absence, if you value your place. There are the keys—if the gentlemen do come back to-night, do everything for their comfort. This is the key of the wine-closet; and, remember, if you try my dresses on, I shall know it when I come back."

“La, ma’am, as if I should think of such a thing!” protested Sally, indignantly, as she took the keys.

Elise stepped into the cab, saying to the driver, in a low tone:

“If you get the next train to Montreal, I will give a dollar besides your fare.”

Sally went singing about her work, and having accomplished everything her hands could find to do, toward evening she took possession of her mistress’ apartment, and luxuriously rested from her labors. Then, notwithstanding the prohibition she had received, and her indignant repelling of the same, she took down every one of Elise’s dresses; and slowly, and with intense enjoyment, tried them on, one after another, with much satisfaction at their perfect fit, and secretly convinced that she made a finer figure in them than their real owner.

* * * * *

The night was far advanced when Allan and Dangerfield entered the suburbs of Toronto from their journey to Trafalgar—a township some twenty miles distant; but there was a fine moonlight, and it was a beautiful spring night, and they found the ride thoroughly enjoyable.

The night brought back to Edgar’s mind his parting with Adelaide, and again he lived over the rapturous moments when he had held her in his arms, his lips pressed to hers, and her voice whispering in his ear that she loved him.

“My beautiful—my own!” he murmured, half-aloud. “There is nothing now to stand between us. I wonder if Elise has discovered her loss yet, and if the poor little wretch is very furious. I suppose I shall have a fine scene with her—would it not be best to destroy the hateful paper, and deny all knowledge of it? No, I will keep it, and if she refuses to listen to reason, I will burn it before her eyes.”

“Dangerfield, do you see that great light in the sky, off toward the north?” asked Allan. “It looks like a fire!”

“So it is!” rejoined Edgar, spurring his horse. “Come on, I enjoy a fire as much as when I was in knickerbockers.”

The two young men rode rapidly forward, and soon they

found themselves on the outside of a crowd, so that they were obliged to move more slowly, and with care.

“By Jove! Dangerfield,” exclaimed Allan, when they came in sight of the house, which was on one side a sheet of flame.

“Yes, Allan, you are right—it is my house!” said Edgar. “Good God! Where are the girls—but of course, they must have escaped.”

The crowd soon parted, giving them full room to ride through, as soon as it was understood that one of the gentlemen was the owner of the burning house. Dangerfield and Allan rode close up to the doomed building, so near, that the heat from the flames scorched their faces. The fire-engines were playing on the flames, but it was evidently a hopeless task; and the crowd was waiting to see the building fall in.

Dangerfield, in an anxious and excited manner, was questioning those about him; but scarcely hearing what they said.

“There’s been no sign of a living being about the house, sir, since we came here,” said the man. “Whoever was in it must have escaped—I saw the girl late in the evening at the grocer’s. Oh, the Lord of mercy, see there!”

While he was speaking, the figure of a woman appeared through the smoke and flames, rushing toward the window. Where she had been, or what she had been doing up to that moment, not to have known her danger sooner, will never be known on this earth; but it was evident that she had only discovered it.

Shriek upon shriek burst upon the air, and Dangerfield instinctively bounded from his horse, and tried to rush forward, but many hands caught and restrained him, and cried out that it was worse than useless.

“Don’t you see?” he screamed, turning to Allan. “It is Elise—it is my wife—her face is turned from us, but you, too, must recognize the dress. It is the one she wore the night we came. Let me loose, for God’s sake—let me try to save her!”

Even while he spoke, there was a loud crash. The burn-

ing house fell together in a fiery heap, and the woman was buried within it.

CHAPTER VII.

THE HAPPY WIDOWER.

IF Edgar Dangerfield had been the most devoted husband that a fond wife adored, he could not have shown more despair and grief than he exhibited over what he supposed to be the tragic fate of Elise. The horror and anguish, which were almost exaggerated in their intensity at first, were, for the time, quite sincere; and it was entirely characteristic of Edgar that they should be so. As the house collapsed and the shrieking woman was buried in its fiery ruins, Edgar uttered an answering shriek, and covered his face with his hands to shut out the sight. He had a feminine repugnance to looking on terrible scenes; and had the unhappy woman been the merest stranger, the sight of her horrible death would have affected him in the same manner. For a few moments he was quite unconscious of anything save the sickening horror of what had just taken place. Allan took charge of him, and, with the assistance of some of the bystanders, managed to reseat him on his horse. He was deathly pale, seemingly unconscious of what was being done with him, and to the lookers-on, apparently beside himself with grief.

“Poor gentleman!” said a woman, looking kindly at the marble-white, beautiful face—and fascinated by its beauty as most women were, of whatever class, “perhaps the lady was a friend or relation?”

She turned to Allan as she spoke, and he answered:

“Yes, she was a near and dear friend.”

“Ah, the Lord help him, then, he’s had a sore grief.”

The crowd had now thinned, for the fire was too recent, and the ruins in too dangerous a condition for any efforts to be made to recover the dead woman’s body; and Allan led Dangerfield’s horse till they had reached the end of the street.

“Come, Edgar,” he said; then, in a kindly manner, “try

to rouse yourself—a terrible thing has happened—but you must bear it like a man.”

Dangerfield did rouse himself so far as to look into his companion's face; but it was evident that he was still quite dazed. He said nothing, but he spurred his horse, and the two young men rode rapidly till they had reached the nearest hotel—which was more than a mile distant. On the way, Edgar partially recovered from the shock, and as his mind cleared, he began dimly to see the great advantages of his present situation. How often had he wished that he could see his way out of the unfortunate mess his haste and imprudence had got him into, and now the way was cleared—every obstacle was swept from his path—Elise was dead! He had not wished for anything so terrible, he said in his mind; he tried to persuade himself that he never desired her death, only his own freedom. In any case he had done nothing to occasion it; his conscience was quite free; he had not even done her any great wrong, for perhaps she had never discovered that he had abstracted her marriage-certificate. He had not even destroyed the paper, and now he told himself that he had never meant to do so—only to keep it in his own care for better security.

It was with decided triumph and a feeling that fate specially favored him, that Edgar reflected that Elise's marriage certificate was safe. Now that nothing stood between himself and Adelaide—now that he felt quite certain of making her his wife, he could afford to think of other matters, and to give his own private interests that sole and particular attention of which he was conscious they had been deprived. Adelaide was a great heiress, and of course he was going to marry her; but as her money had been all along a secondary consideration, it was with peculiar pleasure that Edgar now reflected that his freedom had also brought him independence and a considerable property, for, as Elise's husband, of course he could claim the estate and wealth which the law had declared hers. Edgar hugged himself with delight at his own shrewdness in keeping safe the certificate of his own marriage. Of course he would marry Adelaide first, before making any claims to his dead wife's property; for, although it was

quite unlikely that Adelaide would ever learn anything on the subject in case it got into the newspapers, even if she should, she would then be his wife, and he appreciated the great difference such a state of affairs would make if she should chance to learn that he had been previously married. The more he thought on the subject, the more reason he found to be quite satisfied and delighted with the present aspect of his affairs. The one thing he now regretted was the manner in which he had presented Allan to Elise. He felt assured that he had created in his mind precisely the impression he had intended at the time; but now he wished that Allan should understand distinctly that the Morel heiress had been his wife.

“Why not take him into my confidence?” thought Dangerfield. “I shall require witnesses of Elise’s death and of the manner of it, when I come to make my claim, and Allan would be a most valuable witness. I shall make him my confidant, for he’s disposed to be friendly enough, and that’s precisely the way to nail him.”

Allan gave Dangerfield the opportunity for confiding in his friendship so soon that there was no time for farther consideration. Although Edgar had not yet spoken a word since the time they had turned from the scene of the fire, and had allowed Allan to make all the arrangements when they reached the hotel, it was evident that he had now pretty well recovered from the first shock of the fire; and as soon as the two young men were in their room together, Allan commented on the circumstance in his own way.

“Well, Edgar, old fellow, I’m glad you’re not so awfully cut up as I feared you were at first. It was awful—but after all, considering that there were no absolutely serious relations between you——”

“I don’t know what you call serious relations,” Edgar interrupted. “She was my wife, poor, unfortunate girl!”

“Your wife? Really, now?”

“My wife, yes; why should you doubt me?” asked Edgar, angrily, quite oblivious that he had been at some pains to make the fact seem doubtful.

“Why, you know—well, Edgar, don’t be mad, but you didn’t act as if she was your wife.”

“How did I act, pray? But, however I have acted, it doesn’t alter the fact. Elise was my wife, and I never meant to make her regret it, either, whatever my behavior may have led you to believe. The fact is, Allan, I was thoroughly wretched—so miserable that I was off my head nearly half the time. I married Elise in haste; she was totally unsuited to me—I should never have married her, and I began to repent, not at leisure, but in a terrible hurry, when I fell hopelessly, madly in love with another woman.”

“By Jove! Really married to the girl—I can scarcely believe it.”

“Perhaps this will assist you,” said Edgar, provoked; and drawing forth the marriage lines of which he had robbed Elise.

Across the back of the paper was written:

“Certificate of marriage between Elise Morel, of Montreal, Dominion of Canada; and Edgar Dangerfield, of Dangerfield, New York, United States.”

Allan merely read the outside writing, for he saw at once that the document was genuine; he returned it with something like contempt, as he touched the pocket from which Dangerfield had drawn it, and asked, coldly:

“Was that where she kept it? poor little woman!”

Dangerfield could not support the look, and a pale flush of mortification arose to his brow.

“Don’t be too hard on a fellow, Allan,” he cried, subduing his anger. “You are worse than I, to suspect me of such evil. I never meant the girl any wrong. The paper was safer with me, as is proved; for if she had it, there would be nothing left but its ashes. I was greatly distracted—I don’t know what I wished, or what I would have done to gain possession of this other woman; but as it happens I have done nothing, and can now approach her without wrong or shame to any one.”

With which preface, and with much eloquence, Edgar told Allan the whole story of his trials, from his own point

of view; and really, as he told it, it seemed a very tender and touching romance, full of sentiment and fine feeling.

Allan listened sympathetically; and at the conclusion, promised his assistance in any way that might be required of him.

Edgar Dangerfield remained in Toronto for several days, although Allan was obliged to return to his home on the next day. To all outward appearance, his conduct was perfect. He attended and personally superintended the search for the body which was buried in the ruins of his house, and when the charred and blackened remains were drawn forth, his emotion was so great that the by-standers thought he was going to faint. By his order they were placed in a superb rosewood casket, and he attended the funeral as chief mourner. He did not speak to any one of the deceased as having been his wife, but most of those who were present inferred that she had been so; and there was a strong reaction in favor of Elise, even among the people who had at first been most busy with her reputation.

These last sad duties having been attended to, Edgar heaved a sigh of relief, turned his back forever on the scene of his brief married life and poor Elise's blissful honeymoon, and returned to Montreal.

* * * * *

Helen and Adelaide, accompanied by Colonel Dangerfield, attended the opening of the Exhibition; and according to Miss Dangerfield's opinion, it appeared as if her lovely cousin was regarded as one of the objects on exhibition.

"I don't wonder they admire her, papa," said Helen, "and I don't blame them for looking at her, either, but I do wish they wouldn't stare so. And then to come to the root of the matter, I cannot help feeling jealous for Edgar at every prolonged look of admiration that any other man bestows on her."

Colonel Dangerfield laughed, and playfully pinched his daughter's blooming cheek, as he answered:

"Now we have the story in those last words of yours; but don't disturb yourself, my dear, on this subject. If Adelaide cares for Edgar, as you feel so sure she does, make

your mind easy—she is not going to care less because the eyes of indifferent people rest admiringly on her fair face. You forget she is used to admiration, and tired of it.”

“Oh, you dear papa!” exclaimed Helen, “as if any woman was tired of admiration! She may think she is, but let it cease from any cause, and see how soon she finds out her mistake. However, I shan’t borrow trouble—I think Edgar’s affairs are safe. There was a calm and blissful contentment in Adelaide’s manner after Edgar’s departure which makes me think everything was settled between them. She hasn’t told me yet, and I feel that it would be intrusive to ask; but something tells me I shall know about it soon.”

“Then go and put on your hat, my pet, and stop wrinkling that smooth brow over these weighty questions; and tell Adelaide it is time for us to begin our second day’s sight seeing.”

When the Dangerfields returned from their trip to Philadelphia, Helen was more delighted than surprised to find the following brief note from her brother:

“NELLY DEAR: I have been thinking much of several things you said to me during our last conversation together, and perhaps it will not surprise you—for you know how much importance I always attach to your advice—to know that I have considered all that you said, gravely and carefully, and my mind is made up to return to Dangerfield at once. You may expect me almost on receipt of this.

Thine always,

“EDGAR.”

Helen was overjoyed—she looked for the date of the letter, but there was none. It was merely postmarked Montreal, and the stamped date was illegible. She quickly rang the bell and inquired how long since the letter had arrived.

“James brought it from the office last night, Miss Helen.”

“Last night—’tis a wonder he isn’t here already! Well, Mary, get ready Mr. Edgar’s room at once—he is coming home! He will be here on the next train, probably in time for dinner.”

Helen then flew to her cousin’s room, wondering if she

already knew, or if she would hear the tidings first from her.

“Adelaide, Edgar is coming home—he is on the way, now; but perhaps this is no news to you, dear!”

“But it is news, Nelly, and very pleasant news,” returned Adelaide, with a lovely blush.

“And he hasn’t written to you, too? the wretch!”

“No, I couldn’t expect to rival his fair sister on such short notice,” laughed Adelaide.

“Oh, you arch deceiver—a fine rival any sister would be for you. Come, confess, now—I must know what this sudden return means on the part of Edgar; and now I observe it, you don’t seem in the least surprised, although when he went away his business seemed of such importance that even an hour’s delay was dangerous.”

“I confess I am not so much surprised,” murmured Adelaide, “and I’m not jealous, either, although he has written to you and not to me. Let me whisper in your ear, my sweet sister—the night before he left us Edgar told me that he loved me, and—we are engaged to be married.”

Helen uttered a cry of delight; and after the manner of girls they were immediately folded in each other’s arms, and conversation became so rapid and confidential that it is quite impossible to transcribe it farther.

Adelaide and Helen were down-stairs together when Edgar arrived. It would be difficult to say which of the girls first heard and recognized the quick, elastic step that came bounding along the hall, and paused for a single instant at the open door. But Helen immediately turned away, and was completely absorbed in looking out of the window. Adelaide advanced a step or two to meet him, and Edgar caught her in a close and passionate embrace.

“My darling—my own—my queen!” he murmured, between quick and ardent kisses. “I have come back to you—I could not stay away!”

“You know I advised you not to go, dear Edgar,” whispered Adelaide.

“I will take your advice, sweetheart, I will never go again from you.”

"Ahem!" said Helen, after several minutes had been devoted by the lovers to each other, "you used to recognize me sometimes, Edgar, even after a week's absence. But now, I suppose, there will always be a cloud upon your vision when I am present."

Edgar turned and kissed her, drawing her into his embrace with one arm, while he held Adelaide with the other.

He was so handsome, so radiant with joy, so proudly, yet becomingly conscious of good fortune, was it any wonder that his sister and promised bride should look into his face, and think, exultantly, "What a magnificent fellow he is—and he is mine!"

CHAPTER VIII.

A RAILWAY ACCIDENT.

ELISE reached Montreal at a late hour of the afternoon. She was faint and weary from the journey and from want of food; for she had tasted nothing save an occasional glass of water, since she had left her own house in Toronto. But she was not conscious of her weariness. Her heart was so filled with anger, jealousy, the pain of bitter disappointment and outraged feeling, that she was not capable of feeling smaller ills—indeed, while anger survived, she did not realize how deep was the wound to her tender and loving heart. She did not wish to be recognized for the present—no longer on Edgar's account, but on her own; so, calling a close cab, she was driven at once to the house of her lawyer, Mr. McGrath, where she knew she could remain under the protection of his sister as long as it was necessary for her to stay in Montreal. She shrank from telling Mr. McGrath her errand—pride and wounded feeling alike made her desirous of keeping to herself the insult which her husband had put upon her. She never doubted but what she could easily have her certificate replaced, and wondered greatly, when she came to think of it, why Edgar had not remembered that—and even tried to persuade herself that he could not have meant to keep the paper from her, but only to take charge of it, as he had said. Her spirits arose somewhat with this reflection, but still she resolved, having come so far, to provide herself with a

duplicate certificate of her marriage; and then, instead of keeping it any longer private, to publish it at once, and reappear in her native place under her proper name. Bitterly she now repented of having consented to a private marriage; and suspicion having once taken possession of her mind, was not easily dislodged. She began to doubt Edgar's description of his father's harshness; and determined, so soon as she should again be in possession of the proofs, to write and introduce herself to Colonel Dangerfield as his daughter-in-law.

Mr. McGrath received Elise in a warm and cordial manner. He wasn't in the least surprised to see her; for, since the lawsuit had been decided in her favor, he had been daily expecting her to appear and make public her marriage, at the same time that she would take formal possession of her rights. Elise explained her sudden appearance by saying that she required a large sum of money, and declined entering more particularly into her affairs till the next day. It was now Saturday, and on the following morning Elise went to early Mass, as she had been accustomed to do when she was a poor serving maid, her object being to see Father Jerome, who had been her confessor, and who had married her to Edgar. But to her dismay the priest who officiated was an entire stranger; and she remained through the short service with a sinking heart, while the slow minutes dragged onward till she felt as if she had been there a week. At last it was over; the people were gone, and Elise, having waited patiently till the opportunity came, addressed a pew-opener whose face she remembered well—more particularly because she knew he had looked at her closely the day she was married.

“Father Jerome,” she said, in a gasp, “he was not here this morning—he is not ill, I hope?”

“Father Jerome? No, miss, that is, madame, he isn't ill.”

“Ah, I'm so glad!” Elise said, joyously. “I was afraid, seeing him absent—but why,” as a new fear assailed her, “why was he not here this morning—he hasn't gone away?”

“He has gone away.”

The man answered in a grave, subdued tone, that seemed to chill the girl's heart. Her voice almost failed her, for she felt that there would be something fatal to her hopes in the man's answer to her next question: but she nerved herself to put it, and asked, in a faltering voice:

“Where has Father Jerome gone?”

“To heaven, God rest his soul—his reverence is dead.”

“Dead!” cried Elise, with a stifled shriek, as her own heart seemed to die within her. She sank, half-fainting, on a seat, and looked back at the man with horror, as if he had shown her an order for her own execution.

“Sure, madame, don't take on so,” said the man, kindly. “Was it anything very particular—your business with his reverence?—God rest him!—Sure I'd be wishful to do you a service.”

Elise listened, only half comprehending—do her a service? What service could this man do her—what service could any one do her now, unless it was to put a pistol to her head, and help her out of a world that no longer held any place for her.

The man spoke again, offering his services, but she shook her head; and having slipped a piece of money into his hand, turned away, and sadly bent her steps toward the house that sheltered her.

Mr. McGrath, who indulged himself in the luxury of late hours on Sunday morning, had just descended to his own parlor when Elise entered.

“My child, you are ill—what has happened to you?” he asked, coming forward and taking her hand, for Lawyer McGrath, who had begun by taking up the little heiress on “spec,” had ended by feeling a great respect and affection for the girl.

Elise burst into a passion of tears, and for a long time could only sob her grief out; until, spent by its own violence, she at last found her voice, and to her companion's entreaties that she would be calm or at least tell the cause of her grief, she exclaimed:

“I am ruined, Mr. McGrath, that is all—my good name is at the mercy of a man who loves me no more, and I am

without hope of setting myself right even in your eyes, sir—unless you please to believe my simple statement.”

“Very well—I do choose to believe you, simply on your word. Now proceed, and tell me what is the matter.”

Elise, somewhat encouraged by this kindness, told her story in few, but bitter and passionate words; for, as she proceeded and realized more fully the cowardly plot by which she was to be robbed of love, happiness, and good name, in order that another woman might take her place, jealousy stung her to fury, and gave a bitterness to every word she spoke.

Lawyer McGrath looked grave when she began, and his face grew more grave as she proceeded.

“Who were your witnesses?” he asked, when she had concluded.

“There were no witnesses.”

“You don’t tell me that you were mad enough to be married without a witness, Mrs. Dangerfield?”

“I was, sir,” returned Elise, in a low, sad tone! “what would I not have done then that Edgar might have asked?”

“The damned scoundrel!” the lawyer burst out.

He knew from Dangerfield’s own lips that he had married Elise; but he was utterly without a written proof of it, for Edgar, either accidentally or from intention, had never spoken of her as his wife, either in letters addressed to herself or to her lawyer.

“Well, it’s an ugly state of affairs, but not hopeless—not quite hopeless. It’s very unfortunate, the man being dead—that priest, I mean—very unfortunate—it was altogether irregular, his having married you in that way. But there must be some record of the ceremony somewhere—in the marriage register, of course—every such ceremony is registered—has to be. Now, pick up your spirits, child, pick up your spirits. We’ll just go and have breakfast, and then we’ll make a friend at court by seeing pew-openers, and finding out all about the books and where they are to be found.”

This view of the matter had not occurred to the inexperienced girl, and with the elasticity of youth she bright-

ened under the hopeful words of the lawyer. She could never be happy again—for Edgar was lost to her forever—worse than death, for he loved another woman; but at least she could justify her honor as a married woman, and prove her right to bear his name—she could keep him from the woman he loved, too—yes, she could and she would, and that much revenge she should have on her who had stolen his heart; for so far, Elise hated her rival only, and could not quite rid herself of the idea that the man she so adored was in some sense a victim, while the great heiress was the really guilty person.

After breakfast was over next morning it was too late to go forth on their business; but about one o'clock Mr. McGrath, accompanied by Elise, sought the church where she had been so bitterly disappointed in the morning. They had the good fortune to find the man with whom Elise had spoken in the morning, and there was no difficulty, beyond a little delay, in getting to the register of marriages.

But there all good fortune attending their search was at an end. There was no record of any such marriage, nor any written statement remotely pointing to it, to be found in the book. In vain Elise searched from end to end of the volume, examining the record of every day in the year, as well as that of the day on which she was married—neither her name nor Edgar's occurred in the book—not even a name resembling either, and which might, by possibility, have been written in mistake.

“Oh, it is no use for me to struggle farther—everything is against me!” the unhappy girl groaned, turning away in despair.

“Now, my child, this won't do,” said the lawyer, with an affectation of cheerfulness he was very far from feeling. “Let me ask a few questions. You can listen. Can you tell me, my good fellow—you have already obliged us much—can you tell me when the Reverend Father died?”

“It's meself that can, sir, for I was the one that found him in a fit on the last 14th of March that ever was, and from that fit he never recovered, but died before sunset the same day, and the doctors called it heart disease.”

“The 14th of March?” Elise murmured, in a low voice,

intended only for McGrath, "the very day that we were married."

The pew-opener heard the words which were not intended for his ears, and they caused him to fix a close and searching look on Elise, whose face was so concealed by her veil that he had not had a good look at her.

"Them's the very words the gentleman said," the man remarked to the lawyer, "and now I think of it he looked at the Register and seemed pleased—I thought he had found what he wanted."

"What gentleman?" asked Elise, in a sharp, hard voice.

"A beautiful gentleman, madam, one that you could never forget if ye ever saw him. I remembered seeing him here one day before with an uncommon pretty girl, and I mistrusted they wanted to be married then, but I never knew the rights of it—but it's only a few days since the gentleman was here——"

Elise caught the lawyer by the arm, and he felt that she leaned her whole weight upon him, and he knew that she needed the support.

"Oh, come away, sir!" she said, in an agonized whisper. "I have heard enough—too much. My last hope is gone. Don't you see, he came here first and learned that he was secure in what he intended to do, and then he robbed me of my one proof that I was an honest woman? Oh, Edgar—Oh, Edgar, could you not have killed me while I still thought you loved me? but to destroy me in this way—it is cruel—cruel!"

McGrath drew her hastily away, and endeavored, as much as possible, to conceal her agitation; but he could feel the slight form quiver and shake with emotion.

When they returned to his house the grief and rage of Elise were for a long time uncontrollable; she wept and raved—she vowed wild threats of revenge, she uttered piteous moans of distress, she called upon Edgar to return to her—she implored her rival to send him back—it seemed as if her reason tottered, and she had lost all power to control herself or regulate her words. But after long hours' complete abandonment to her desperate condition, she grew

calmer. She apologized for the trouble she had caused, and promised to bear her sorrow with more dignity.

Succeeding her violent and uncontrollable emotion, her enforced quiet and composure was almost disconcerting; and McGrath, who was heartily sorry for her, and anxious to assist her in any possible manner, through his ignorance of women and their ways, was almost at his wits' end how to manage her. Elise retired to her room, and whether she slept or not, quiet reigned within it—so much so that Miss McGrath was somewhat alarmed, and felt much relieved when their young guest emerged in the morning, calm, composed, but deadly pale. Elise was dressed for traveling, and as she was bent on taking the first train for Toronto she would only remain long enough for breakfast, and a few moments' conversation with her lawyer.

“What do you intend to do, my child?” McGrath inquired. “I must know something of your plans before I can allow you to venture on a journey alone, in your excited and wretched state of mind.”

“Have no fears for me, my good, kind friend,” returned Elise. “I am calm enough now, and my mind is made up to a course which will require me to keep calm—I promise you that I *will* keep so, at least in all my outward appearance. For this wretched soul of mine I cannot promise. But listen, and I will tell you my plan; and I think you will approve. I will return to my husband, if he has not already gone away, and I will appeal to his honor to do me justice; and if I fail I will communicate the result to you, my only friend, and be guided by your advice.”

Mr. McGrath acknowledged that this seemed at present the only course that could be pursued; and he accompanied Elise to a cab, put her in, and parted with her, very kindly, but deeply grieved.

So far as restraining outward manifestation of her sorrow went, Elise kept her promise; but thought and bitter suffering were busy within her.

“He will never acknowledge me as his wife,” she thought; “he has, perhaps, before now destroyed the only proof that I am so—my Edgar—my husband, that I have so loved—the man on whom I lavished my hungry heart, that was

starved all my life for some one to love. And how I have loved him—oh, God! how I love him still! And he casts me from him as I have seen him throw aside a pair of gloves he had tired of—how he must love this woman—his cousin, what did he call her, Adelaide!”

She drew her veil closer about her face, for the color would rush into it, like flame; then fade away again, leaving her like a faded lily, and she could not repress the scorching tears that would brim from her full eyes, and seemed to blister her cheeks as they fell.

The train sped on with extraordinary swiftness, but to Elise it seemed scarcely to move; for every minute seemed twenty in her anxiety to reach her little home, and learn whether Edgar had returned, or had forever left her.

“But he is gone!” she thought, in her despair, “without doubt he has gone. I needn’t pursue him—I love him still, and I could do nothing. I have lived too long—it is time for me to leave this sad world where I have always seemed homeless and a stranger. It would be better for me—better for all if I were dead—oh, I wish I could die—I wish I could die!”

A terrible crash—a shock as if the earth was shaken, then a fall, a crush, shrieks of women, cries of children, oaths and screams of men, a sense of pain—pain every where, and then black darkness.

The train had been thrown from the track, several persons were killed, many were seriously and dangerously wounded, and the car next to the locomotive was on fire.

It was a scene of the wildest confusion, terror, grief, and bodily agony, such as nearly always attends upon that terrible horror, a railway accident. Many willing hands were there to aid and to give all the help within their power, but with the utmost expedition it was hours before the dead were removed, the wounded cared for, and the *debris* removed from the track. But at last the train moved on, the stations along the line were telegraphed, and such passengers as were unhurt, and those of the wounded as could be moved, were carried forward to their homes.

As the train moved off a middle-aged man, dressed like a well-to-do farmer, called to one of the railway porters:

“Here, Ben, lend a hand, here’s a poor creature who has been overlooked. She lay here on the other side of the track, hidden by these trees.”

The man addressed as Ben came forward, and stooped over the insensible form of a young woman. She was dressed in a traveling costume of black silk, and her ungloved hand still grasped tightly a small, Russia-leather traveling bag. Her hat had been knocked off, and her magnificent, long, black hair was unbound, and flowed loose about her neck and shoulders. Her face was frightfully cut and bruised, and her pallid lips and brow, stained with blood, had the hue of death.

“It’s no use, Mr. Murray,” said Ben, “she’s dead. See, sir, there ain’t a flicker of the pulse at the wrist.”

“Touch her gently all the same, Ben, and help me carry her to my house. God help her father—if she has one. Poor girl! she must have been a lovely creature; see her splendid hair, and the neat, pretty figure. Married, too, to judge by that plain gold ring—so young, no older than our Nancy, Ben, and to die when, perhaps, she has only begun to live. Poor girl—poor girl!”

CHAPTER IX.

WEDDING BELLS.

EDGAR proved an ardent and impetuous lover. He pleaded for an early marriage, and Adelaide had no wish to refuse. She was as much in love with her cousin as she believed herself capable of being in love with any man; and she was devotedly attached to her uncle and to Helen. It touched her deeply to see the evidences of straitened circumstances which all their pride and all their care could not conceal from her; and she knew what a God-send her wealth would be to the whole family, when, as Edgar’s wife, she would have the right to make it flow freely upon all. So when Edgar pressed his suit with an ardor which could not fail to be pleasing, she affected no maiden shyness, but said, with a lovely blush and a happy laugh:

“Since we love each other, dear Edgar, and have agreed to be married, of course, any unnecessary delay would be

ridiculous. But as I have not come with a trousseau all ready prepared—not having anticipated any such necessity—you must allow me a little time. I insist on the traditional bridal robes, and the customary number of lovely dresses; I never cared much about such things before, but as one doesn't expect to be married more than once, of course one must make the most of the great occasion—don't you think so, dear?"

"I think whatever you think, my darling," said Edgar, holding her hands, and looking at his own reflection in her fine eyes. But don't be too hard on me—try to think how I love you—and tell me when I may call you all my own—my wife!"

"Let it be two weeks from to-day, then, Edgar."

"You are an angel!" exclaimed the happy lover, kissing her two fair hands. "But isn't a fortnight a very long time to make a dress?"

"A dress, sir?—A dozen dresses, if you please; and little enough time to do them in, too."

So the marriage was fixed for the 1st of June; and the preparations for the happy event went forward briskly.

Helen Dangerfield had never been so happy in her life; her match-making had thriven beyond what she had dared to hope, for she had not thought that Adelaide would consent to such a speedy marriage; and now she found herself surrounded with all the delightful paraphernalia of a wedding, and realized that she was in her element.

A fashionable dressmaker, with two assistants, was brought down from the metropolis, and the cousins, accompanied by Edgar, made frequent flying trips to the city to match silks, to buy trimmings—in short, "to do a little shopping," with all the varieties of entertainment which women alone know to be wrapped up in that magic phrase.

"Helen, dear, I must have a maid, too," said Adelaide, one day. "I think I will make out an advertisement, minutely describing the article I am in want of, and have it left at the principal daily paper offices."

"Oh, Adelaide, no—not till after the wedding, anyway," pleaded Helen, adding, in a tone of mock despair: "I'm sorry you find me so inefficient, ma'am, but indeed I will

try to improve, and give better satisfaction if you will put up with me a while longer."

"Oh, it isn't inefficiency, you little humbug," laughed Adelaide, "it is that I'm afraid you're going to serve me just as the others did, and leave me for a husband. There really seems to be something fatal to single blessedness in entering my service."

"You don't mean to insinuate that Nelly's in love?" said Edgar, from his place at Adelaide's feet, where he sat holding a skein of floss silk, while she wound it from his fingers. "I shall be jealous—I couldn't stand it—she never was known to look at any man save her brother, and, well—perhaps her father—since the hour she was born."

"One must do something in self-defense," returned Helen. "Since you have ceased to have eyes for any save one fair maiden I have grown desperate; but, so far, I have only got to the extent of occasionally looking upon other representatives of your sex for purposes of comparison, merely."

"Edgar, don't believe all she says—I tell you she had a positive flirtation with such a fine-looking gentleman in Philadelphia, when we went to the Centennial opening, on the 10th of May."

"Now, Adelaide, try to tell the truth, dear; even if you can't, it would be praiseworthy to make the effort. You know right well you were the attraction."

"Well, I admit that I was, perhaps, at first. He followed us with his glances, hour after hour, and it really seemed as if we were the show he had come to see. At first he favored me with his most particular regard; but when, in the afternoon, as we were trying to find our carriage, Nelly's adventurous spirit took her among a lot of strange horses, and she was nearly run over and killed, frightening poor, dear uncle and myself so that we didn't recover until next day, lo! our admirer proved himself her knight, rescued her in the most gallant manner, bore her to the arms of her terrified papa, and really, on the whole, behaved beautifully. Of course uncle was as grateful as possible, the gentlemen exchanged cards, and shook hands, and mutually hoped they would become better acquainted; and——"

"And what was the end of it," interrupted Helen, "for we

never saw him again. And although papa invited him most cordially to make himself our guest, in case he ever came in the neighborhood of Dangerfield, you see what haste he has made to avail himself of the invitation, and what slight material this imaginative girl requires to work out a romance."

"Never mind, Miss Nelly—and you see, Edgar, if I don't prove a prophetess. Helen's sweetheart will appear on the scene again; he isn't going to give her up in that way, and you must acknowledge that I am right in getting ready for an emergency, for I shall need another waiting-maid before a month."

"Well, don't speak of it again until the wedding is over, that's a darling—don't bring a prying, inquisitive, strange young woman into the house just now, when I want you all to myself for the little while that remains."

"Well, Mary, what is it?"

"If you please, Miss Helen, Madame Moran says if Miss Urquhart will please to come out here and have the white satin bodice tried on, as she would be much obliged and try not to trouble her again."

"Come, Adelaide, I'll go, too. I am much interested in the fit of that bodice," cried Helen, jumping up, and leading the way. Adelaide stayed a moment to wind up the last thread of her silk, and then gave the ball of floss to Edgar to hold till she came back. As she moved away, he caught the skirt of her dress, and pressed it passionately to his lips, and she looked back at him with a radiant smile, and threw him a kiss from the rosy tips of her fingers.

"Really," she thought, "he is a perfect lover—so handsome; so devoted, so constant and delicate in his attentions—so impassioned, and yet so reverent in his manner. No girl could have a more charming lover—I declare it is very nice, and I'm as happy as a queen."

Edgar looked at her with joy and triumph. "So beautiful, so bright, and all my own!" he murmured. "Certainly I am the luckiest fellow that ever was born. Fate, itself, favors me. That poor little Elise! how lucky it was that she died. She would have been a perfect source of misery

to herself and to me, if she had lived; and now she is safe from all her woes and disappointments."

"For noiseless falls the foot of Time,
That only falls on flowers."

Edgar didn't know the lines but he felt them, as the swift days chased each other toward the golden day that was to make the fair heiress his wife; and soft, sweet, and noiseless as the falling of rose petals on the grounds, the hours flew onward.

One morning Adelaide came down to breakfast late, a circumstance so unusual that every one at the table looked up when she made her appearance, prepared with some playful remark on the subject; but the light words were unuttered, for she sat down quietly, without looking at any one, and her face was very pale and troubled.

"My darling, you are ill," said Edgar, anxiously.

"No, I am not ill," returned the latter, coldly, drawing her hand away from her lover's tender clasp.

"Then what in the world is the matter, Adelaide? and please don't look so tragic," said Helen, frightened, she couldn't tell why, although she tried to speak lightly.

"I hope nothing has happened, my dear? you have had no ill news?" said Colonel Dangerfield, kindly.

"No, dear uncle, nothing of the kind. The fact is, I am very silly, but I have had a disagreeable dream, and it was so painfully vivid that I scarcely seem to have quite waked from it yet."

Colonel Dangerfield laughed, and Edgar and Helen looked relieved.

"Now, my dear, you don't profess to have that troublesome Scotch gift of second sight?" said the old gentleman. "If you have, discourage it, for it will get you into constant trouble and worry, and never do you any good."

"Well, uncle, they used to say we had a gift in my father's family; and, really, my last night's experience was very like some things I have heard of it."

"Nonsense, my dear, there's no such thing. You may have had a disagreeable dream, of course, I don't doubt it. We all sat up too late last night, and I didn't sleep well myself; and then that salad of Helen's was to blame, I'm

sure. I never knew you to make a mistake before, Nell, but certainly there was something wrong with the dressing——”

“Oh, say it was me,” laughed Helen, very glad to bear the blame, “and now let me give you some coffee, Adelaide; although I did make it this morning, I think it will bear drinking.”

Adelaide made an effort to overcome her depression, and took the cup of coffee from her cousin with the radiant smile which seemed to light up her face like sunshine. Then she beamed upon her lover, and so dispelled the cloud from his brow, and the breakfast proceeded with almost the customary amount of playful and enjoyable conversation which generally made it such a pleasant beginning to the day.

But Helen saw that her cousin's spirits were forced; and although Colonel Dangerfield, and even Edgar, soon forgot all about Adelaide's dream, and thought her as gay as usual, the quicker and deeper feminine eyes were not deceived, and Helen felt quite sure there was more in her cousin's troubled eyes than the memory of an ordinary, or even very unpleasant, dream.

In the course of the day, when the two girls were alone in their dressing-room, during the hour before dinner, Helen returned to the topic of the morning.

“Sister, darling—for you know you are my sister in heart and soul—I can't bear to see you so troubled. Will you not tell me, dear Adelaide, all about this horrid dream—or whatever it is that makes you so unlike yourself!”

“Yes, Helen, I will,” Miss Urquhart said, adding, with an abruptness that was almost startling, “I feel, Helen, that I have received a warning not to marry Edgar.”

“Adelaide! What do you mean?”

“You must not laugh, Nelly, and I will tell you all about it.”

“Laugh?” returned Helen, piteously, as the tears rushed to her eyes, “I am more likely to cry, if you even dream of such a thing. Not marry Edgar—oh—oh—oh—poor Edgar—poor Edgar!”

“Hush, now, Nelly dear, you know it was only in a dream I thought of it.”

“But you are wide awake now, Adelaide, and your wedding-dress all made, and the veil and the orange blossoms come home—it will kill Edgar—I know it will kill him—”

“Oh, do be quiet, you ridiculous child, and listen to me. I only want to get this horrid dream off my mind---and I would rather defy all the dreams that were ever sent to make sleep hideous than make you cry---I believe I love you more than Edgar, after all, so just listen.”

Helen dried her tears, and with the quick self-control she was always capable of, turned a calm and attentive face toward her cousin.

“You know how late it was when we all went to bed last night, and I was so tired that it seemed to me that almost before my head touched the pillow, I was sound asleep. At first so deeply, so dreamlessly, that I knew nothing---I was not even conscious that I lived; when on a sudden, I seemed to be wide awake, and a girl stood beside my bed, looking down at me. I saw her so distinctly that I can never forget her face—I could draw it now, if I had the skill to put it upon paper. She was small and slight, with a piquant, pretty face—or at least it must have been pretty once, but it was now bruised, cut and covered with blood; and her great dark, wild eyes glared down on me, and seemed to burn into my soul. Then she spoke, and I heard her words, and the quivering, vibrating tone of her voice, just as distinctly as I saw her. ‘I know that he loves you,’ she said, ‘but he is mine—mine! I am his wife—do not dare come between us?’

“Then she was gone, and I lay there, wide awake, cold and trembling, and looking at the early morning light that was faintly stealing through the parted curtains. I started up, frightened, but trying to persuade myself that I had dreamed. I bathed my face, drew the curtains close, darkened the room as much as possible, and returned to bed; after a long time I fell asleep again, deeply and soundly as before. But not for long. Again the same girl stood by

my bedside—again she looked at me with eyes that even now seem to scorch me, and again she spoke:

“Woman, I tell you he is mine! Edgar Dangerfield is my husband—do not dare to come between us!” and as I started up in bed with a loud cry, I saw that I was alone, and that it was morning, for the curtains were parted and drawn back, and the sunshine fell right across my bed. Now, Helen, I know that I closed the curtains and darkened the room—what hand had parted them and drawn them back while I slept? I arose and examined the door—it was fast locked, as I have the habit of always locking my door, since I have traveled so much, and have been alone in so many strange places. I looked at my watch, and found that it was five o’clock, and then I lay down again—for my head was heavy from want of sleep, and I was nervous and frightened. I must have fallen asleep then, I suppose, for I didn’t wake again till the bell rang for breakfast. Now, Cousin Helen, do you wonder that I am unlike my usual self, and not quite sure whether I am yet fully awake?”

Helen was more impressed and startled than she chose to acknowledge, whereas Miss Urquhart seemed to think more lightly of her night’s visions now that she had put them into words.

“You know it is simply absurd,” said Helen, determined to give no serious attention to what she had just heard. “Edgar scarcely ever looked at a woman till you came; so the idea of any one being his wife is too absurd for consideration. He has been satiated with feminine admiration—so much so that he almost disliked women. I was as much surprised as delighted when he fell in love with you, dear—although, of course it was impossible he could have helped himself.

“The whole thing was an ugly dream—don’t think of it any more. Papa was right—my salad last night must have been an awful failure. But don’t tell this nightmare of yours to Edgar, Adelaide—he would think you had tired of your bargain and wanted to break with him. And then Heaven knows what absurd thing he would do—he might

think you suspected him of wanting your money, and in that case he wouldn't marry you, for the dread of incurring such a suspicion kept him a long while from telling you that he was over head and ears in love with you."

"Did it, Nelly?—the dear fellow! I thought there was something of the kind," said Miss Urquhart. She forgot her dream, and her heart glowed and warmed toward Edgar.

"You might have known it, dear, for he adored you from the first moment, only he was positively afraid to tell you so. And now do forget all about that ugly dream—you shall have no more late suppers, and I will send you to bed at nine o'clock to-night.

"Very well—only I hope I won't dream it again—I'm just so silly, it makes me nervous,"

"Let me sleep in your room to-night, Addie—bad dreams never come near me."

So the two girls slept together that night; and Helen watched her cousin's slumbers, as if she had been an infant committed to her care. In the morning she inquired anxiously, but with a laugh:

"Well, what did you dream?"

"Nothing."

"Charming—the best possible dream; and to-morrow is your wedding day."

The next day Helen's morning kiss waked Adelaide.

"Well, did you dream anything remarkable?"

"Nothing remarkable, Nell—only that you were a goose, and I wake to find it true. Don't be alarmed, dear, I shall marry Edgar—no amount of dreams would make me disappoint you."

"Me, dear? But surely you love Edgar?"

"Of course I love him, why else should I marry him? But I really think I care more for you, Nelly."

"Thank you, love, that sounds nice, and it is just as true as I would have it. But come—it is time to dress, and this is why I wouldn't let you have a waiting-maid. Because I wanted to dress you in your wedding robes myself."

Adelaide was the loveliest bride in the world; Edgar

thought so, and everybody else said so. All Dangerfield was at the wedding—the church bells rang the merriest peal; the bride-maids were charming; the best man was exactly on time; the ring fitted to a charm, and not the least little thing went wrong.

“And so much for dreams!” whispered Helen, as the bride entered the carriage. “Only never tell dear Edgar. It might hurt his feelings.”

CHAPTER X.

SOMEBODY'S TOMBSTONE.

MR. MURRAY and his companion carried the insensible girl across the green fields to an old-fashioned farm-house, about a quarter of a mile distant.

A neat, motherly woman met them at the door; and having known of the railway accident, she had the discretion to make no outcry at sight of the burden they bore between them; noiselessly, and without a word, she preceded them to the spare room, and they laid Elise on the small, clean, fresh bed. A messenger was then dispatched for the nearest physician; and Mrs. Murray having called in the assistance of her daughter Nancy—a fresh-colored, wholesome girl, of much the same age as Elise herself—the two women undressed their patient, and put her to bed.

“Mother, is she dead?” asked the girl, in a low, hushed tone.

“I think not, child,” replied the mother, while she tenderly washed the blood-stains from the death-like face. “But I can't tell—these wounds are like to bleed yet, I think, and there seems a faint flicker of the pulse here, but I can't feel the heart at all—it's like she's dead, poor thing.”

“And how dreadfully her face is cut, mother, and she so pretty. Is she a lady, do you think?”

“Well, I canna tell, child, except judging from her clothes, an' they're fine enough for anything. But there's no name on her underclothing, and no mark on her handkerchief. It's but right to open that satchel, if you can find a key to fit it, so that we may get a clue to her friends,

if she has any—and eh, me! look at this—the poor thing's married, for here's a wedding ring on her finger. My, but her man will be in a bouny way to see her pretty face cut up like this, if she lives."

"Surely he wouldn't be cruel enough to mind that," said Nancy, indignantly, "for she looks just as good as she's pretty. But see this, mother, though her hand is small, it doesn't look like the hand of a lady—see how brown it is, and the palm is hard. It seems like a servant's hand."

"Well, child, never mind what it's like, for she looks as if she would never open her eyes again. See if you can find a key, and open that satchel."

The key of the satchel was found at last, after some searching in Elise's portemonnaie, in the pocket of her dress; but the satchel, being opened and diligently searched, yielded not the least atom of information as to its owner's identity—it contained not so much as a scrap of paper on which a name of either place or person could be discovered; and although two or three more handkerchiefs were drawn out from its depths, not even an initial marked them as indicating their owner's name.

"Mother, here's a great roll of money!" exclaimed Nancy, "bank bills—oh! ever so many."

"Well, that's lucky, then, for we can get her the best medical care, and without money we couldn't do it. Bring it here, child."

Nancy obeyed; and at the same moment the farmer appeared at the door, accompanied by the physician, who had, fortunately, been captured on his return from the recent accident, and before he had time to set out on his customary visits.

He was Dr. Flint, and his name was generally pronounced with a smile; for he was well known as the softest-hearted man in Canada, and skilful as he was kind and gentle. He now proceeded to examine Elise, as tenderly as if she had been his daughter. Her wounds were carefully dressed; but her face continued as ghastly as when she was first brought in, and the faint pulsation at the wrist was so feeble as scarcely to be felt. Dr. Flint looked very grave.

"There is concussion of the brain here," he said, turning

to Mrs. Murray, "and it is very doubtful whether she will ever recover from the stupor. However, we can but do our best. The patient is young, and there is about her the appearance of great vitality."

Elise did not die, although for days and weeks she trembled on the brink and it seemed as if a breath would blow her into eternity. All her magnificent black hair was cut off, and Mrs. Murray folded it away in soft tissue paper, and dropped a tear among the raven tresses as she did so. The unfortunate girl was delirious, day and night, for a fortnight.

She raved of everything, except her own affairs—she repeated entire passages from books she had read. She rambled over disconnected romances of her own imagining. She talked of, and to, personages of fiction, and seemed to think them real and to be surrounded by them; but never, from first to last, did she utter her own name or Edgar's, or that of any other person whom she had ever known.

Mrs. Murray and Nancy, who had been the most faithful and devoted of nurses, could gain nothing from their patient's ravings to gratify their pardonable curiosity as to who she was, whence she came, or whither she was going; and so they were fain to wait until she should be sufficiently recovered to give a coherent account of herself. But this prospect began to grow dim; for though Elise was rapidly recovering in physical condition—and, indeed, grown quite strong and ate with a hearty appetite, it seemed as if her mind was a blank. She either lay hour after hour looking at her hands and playing with her fingers, turning her wedding-ring around and around for hours at a time, or else raved disconnected and incoherent nonsense. The worst feature in her condition now was sleeplessness—night after night she lay awake, with wide-open, unwinking eyes fixed upon the candle-light, sleepless through all the watches of the night. The Murrays were unceasing in their attention, but still it had been necessary to have a professional nurse from the nearest town, because of the constant watching necessary during the night.

One morning, when Mrs. Murray came into the kitchen at the early hour customary in that household, she found the nurse dozing in a chair by the window, and she brought her to a condition of wakefulness in a somewhat abrupt manner.

"The sick lady is fast asleep, ma'am," the woman explained, apologetically.

"The Lord be thanked!" ejaculated the good woman, fervently. "How long has she slept?"

"All night, ma'am---she fell into a quiet sleep about ten o'clock, and has slept like a baby all night."

Elise slept all the day, and when Dr. Flint called in the evening, she was still wrapt in profound slumber.

"Let her be in no way disturbed," said the pleased physician, and he was obeyed. So Elise slept all the night. But when, at noon of the next day, she still showed no sign of waking, Mrs. Murray grew alarmed, and sent for Dr. Flint. He came about the middle of the afternoon, and found the girl still soundly sleeping. He felt her pulse, and looked critically at the pale face, which, although no longer thin, had never recovered its bloom.

"The case is a very curious one," he said, turning to Mrs. Murray. "With your permission, I will stay here till the patient wakes, or---ah---um---I shall tell you, perhaps, that she will either awaken clear and rational in mind, or else she will pass away gently in sleep, probably the latter, poor child! probably the latter."

So Dr. Flint remained, and Mrs. Murray, who was too anxious to sleep, insisted on taking the nurse's place, and together they watched all night beside the sleeping girl. About two o'clock, a strange change was visible in Elise. During her long sleep, her appearance had been natural, and she seemed to slumber peacefully and calmly. But now her face grew rigid, her lips turned livid, and the usual paleness of her complexion increased to the pallor of death; her pulse could not be felt, she did not seem to breathe, and a mirror held before her lips showed no perceptible dimness of the surface.

"She is dying," whispered Mrs. Murray, "or is she dead."

Dr. Flint merely shook his head, but never removed his gaze from the white, rigid face.

Hour followed hour slowly, and toward five o'clock came another change. The hard, tense expression of the face relaxed, the features assumed a natural look, a faint pink tinged the lips, a pearly dew broke out on the white brow, and, with a long sigh, the great dark eyes slowly unclosed. Their gaze was no longer wild or rambling, but full of wonder, as it searched the anxious faces bent over her.

"How do you feel, my dear?" asked Mrs. Murray.

"I am quite well, thank you, but I don't know where I am. Everything is strange."

"You are with very good people, my child," said Dr. Flint. "You have been very ill, and but for your kind nurses, you would have died."

Elise snatched her hand from the gentle clasp that held it, and a look of anguish and despair convulsed her face.

"I remember now," she cried, "I remember everything! And there was an accident to the train, and I was not killed. I wanted to die—I prayed to die. Oh, why could you not let me die? I would have died if you had left me alone. Oh, my God! Why do I live—why do I live?"

She wrung her hands, and burst into a wild passion of tears. Mrs. Murray was quite broken-hearted, and neither knew how to comfort her nor how to bear reproaches for all she had done in kindness.

"Let her weep," said Dr. Flint. "It will do her no harm."

Elise's rain of tears was soon over. She sat up in bed, and asked, abruptly:

"Am I much disfigured?" Her voice, that was naturally sweet, sounded harsh and stern.

"Don't be thinking of that now, dear," said the motherly woman, in a soothing manner. "Surely no one will think of it—your friends will be too happy to have you alive."

Elise laughed harshly; then catching sight of the little mirror which had been used to learn if she still lived, she snatched it up, and peered into it.

For some moments she looked at her own reflection as if

it had been the face of a stranger, then dropping the glass with a scream, she covered her face with her hands.

“Take it away—take it away!” she cried. “Is that me—that scarred, deformed, hideous face? Oh, never let me look on it again! Yet what need I care? To him I was no longer beautiful—what does it matter how I look to others?”

She lay back upon the pillow, quietly, without another word, and turned her face to the wall.

Dr. Flint and Mrs. Murray sadly looked at her and at each other, then left the room.

Elise continued strong; youth and an excellent constitution asserted themselves, and would not be overcome. She grew well and strong in spite of her own wishes. But she would have nothing to say to anyone. Mrs. Murray invited her confidence, but the girl was deaf to the voice of kindness; her heart was dead.

“Where are your friends, my dear?” Mrs. Murray asked.

“I have no friends.”

“What is your name, then—you shall tell me that?”

“I have no name.”

“But you have a home somewhere—you must let us write to your people.”

“I have neither home nor people. Please ask me no more questions—I am going away soon.”

On the next day Elise appeared at the breakfast table, fully dressed for traveling, her hat on, and her satchel in her hand. Remonstrance or entreaty was in vain. She was determined to go—and go she would. She ate breakfast, then drew her veil close about her, and arose from the table.

“What day of the month is it?” she asked.

Nancy answered:

“It is the first of June, ma’am,” and the young girl looked wistfully at the other girl, and tears arose to her eyes at the sight of that wasted and embittered life.

“And I have been here since the 8th of May—more than three weeks! Where is he now?” thought Elise, with a groan of anguish. She turned to Mrs. Murray.

“I wish I could thank you as I ought,” she said, “for all that you have done in kindness for me, but I cannot. Try to forgive me.”

Mrs. Murray brought forward a large roll of bills, and gave them to Elise.

“It is all there just as we found it, except what we paid for doctors, and the nurse.”

“And I hope you will let me pay you, too, for your trouble?”

“No, I cannot do that—but there is something I kept for you—I thought you would like to have it, but you won’t care, perhaps,” and she put in her hand the package wrapped in tissue paper. Elise took it mechanically, thrust her money into the satchel, and turning away, left them all staring after her.

By and by Farmer Murray put on his hat, followed her at a distance to the station, and saw her get on board the train of cars that was just leaving.

Elise reached Toronto in safety, and without adventure. During the journey she opened the parcel which Mrs. Murray had given her, and found that it contained the magnificent tresses of her own luxuriant hair. She opened the window beside her, and cast them fiercely out on the road, where the wind scattered them, and many happy birds carried them away for their new spring houses. Elise returned to her home, not expecting to find Edgar there, but wishing to learn if he had come back, and what he had said or done on finding her absent. She found nothing but ashes where her pretty house had stood, and those who told her of the fire told her also how the pretty lady who lived there had been burned to death, and the handsome gentleman had been nearly crazed about it when he came home. Elise smiled bitterly. Her heart was hard and cold, and the description of Edgar’s sorrow stirred no gentle feeling within her.

In the evening she wandered away to the Necropolis, and the sexton pointed out to her a grave, and a new tombstone which had been that very day placed there, according to orders left by Mr. Dangerfield. She read the inscription:

Sacred to the Memory of
ELISE MOREL—

Beyond that she could not read. Hard, dry sobs shook her from head to foot, and she leaned for support against the tombstone that bore her name.

“Not his wife!” she murmured, “even in death he could not call me his wife.”

Great large tears rose to her eyes, but they took no pain from her heart—they scorched her dry eyelids as they overflowed, and seemed to burn a channel as they fell and rolled over the sunken, pallid cheeks.

CHAPTER XI.

HELEN'S SWEETHEART.

EDGAR and Adelaide returned to their home, after a week spent in Philadelphia. Mrs. Dangerfield had original ideas in regard to wedding trips, and according to her views, the time for the grand marital tour was not immediately after the wedding, but at some late and distant day, when the parties were beginning to tire of each other, and needed variety as a spice to the monotony of life.

“And at any rate,” said the blooming bride, “where should any one go just at this particular time, except to Philadelphia—if they must go anywhere.”

So to Philadelphia they went, and a week of it proved sufficient at a time; so they were glad to return to Dangerfield.

The wise man who said that in all affairs of the heart there was one who loved, and one who was content to be loved, described the case of Edgar and Adelaide exactly. He was in love, indeed, more deeply in love than ever; while she was graciously and charmingly pleased to be loved. So of course she ruled in everything; her will was law, and her wishes were scarcely expressed ere they were executed.

One of Adelaide's first acts as the mistress of Dangerfield, was to have the upper front room elegantly and richly furnished as a morning room; but as it speedily became the favorite apartment of the whole house, it was soon re-

garded as a kind of general parlor, where all the family were in the habit of assembling, and where favored visitors were invited when ceremony was unnecessary.

One morning Edgar, Adelaide, and Helen were seated in this room, which commanded a fine view of the garden, now radiant in June loveliness, and of the old fashioned graveled walk, bordered with box and sweet smelling shrubs, which made the approach to the house. The two ladies were sewing, and Edgar had been reading to them, but the reading had been brought to a close for the present, by a remark from Adelaide, *apropos* of the poem which had been read.

“I can’t agree with the majority of people,” she said, “in their admiration of Launcelot, and their pity for Guinivere. To my mind the personage in that poem who calls for the loftiest kind of pity and the noblest kind of admiration is King Arthur. He was a perfect man.”

“A perfect man?” echoed Helen, “what a horrible creature!”

“No, my dear—you are talking nonsense—if you will allow me to say so. But then you don’t mean it, for you are only thoughtless, echoing something that you have heard other girls say. The customary stuff that women talk, about a man being much more of a man because he has a spice of the devil in his composition, is all idle folly—no woman really thinks so, certainly no woman whose opinion is good for anything. ‘The blameless, king,’ Arthur was called—and he was ‘blameless,’ not from weakness, as so many people seem to fancy, but from strength; because he was too noble to do anything else. It was just like Guinivere to prefer Launcelot, because she hadn’t brains enough to appreciate her own husband’s superiority; and that is why I can never feel very sorry for her, although it is a fine love-story, and one’s sympathy is expected to go with the losers, right or wrong.”

Edgar listened in silent dismay. For that moment he would have given half the years of his life to have been such a man as Adelaide was praising. A swift, sharp pang shot through his heart—an undefined feeling of jealousy of the “blameless king,” so unlike himself, and of whom his

wife spoke with an enthusiasm more like love than he had ever yet heard from her.

"You are rather hard, my darling," he said, playfully; "could you make no allowance for a poor fellow, for instance, who might be so much in love with yourself as to forget everything else in the world?"

"I'm afraid not," laughed Adelaide. "I should not be able to consider myself as a sufficient excuse for such ill-conduct."

Edgar silently resolved that his wife must *never* learn anything in regard to Elise.

"But, Helen," continued Adelaide, "to shift the conversation to a less lofty theme, don't you think it strange that I should have received not a single answer to my advertisement?"

"Not so very strange, considering the requirements you specified—'a waiting maid who has not the least claim to good looks; who will promise never to speak French; who perfectly understands, and who is ready to sign a written agreement that nothing will induce her to think of matrimony while she is in your service.' It may be long enough, I should think, before you find one to answer that description."

"Well," returned the fair bride, musingly, "I will own that my desires sound a trifle exacting; but that is the article I require, and I must have it—or none. I shall keep my advertisement in print till it brings the required answer. But who is this? Surely I recognize a familiar form coming up the walk! Ah, you are too late, my dear," as Helen ran toward the window, "he has now disappeared within the front porch. But be patient for a few moments," she added, laughing mischievously, "if it is he, of course he will presently be announced, and in the meantime I would not agitate your maiden heart by breathing his name for fear of disappointing you."

Helen retreated to her seat on the lounge, and a faint pink stole into her cheek at her sister's nonsense. At the same moment a servant entered, and Mrs. Dangerfield took the card she brought, and glanced at the name.

"Show the gentleman up here, Mary," she said, and turn-

ing to Helen, as the girl left the room, she called out merrily:

"There, dear, didn't I tell you he wouldn't give you up so?"

"Who is it, then?" inquired Edgar.

"Why, Helen's sweetheart, of course," returned Adelaide, in a low tone, for she had heard approaching footsteps, and the door was thrown open to admit a tall, handsome man, of about middle age, whose dark curling hair was just touched with silver here and there, although his fine, clear complexion was not yet past its youthful freshness. He was faultlessly dressed, and his appearance was what is generally described as distinguished.

Mrs. Dangerfield came forward, and welcomed him most cordially; and as Helen could not keep down a treacherous blush that would rise to her cheek, Adelaide, to give her time, turned to Edgar.

"Dear," she said, "this is the gentleman of whom you have heard me speak so often, Mr. McGrath—he did us such a service on our first visit to Philadelphia. Mr. McGrath, this is my husband, Mr. Edgar Dangerfield."

The gentlemen approached and shook hands. Mr. McGrath remarked:

"We are old—acquaintances, Mr. Dangerfield and myself; and for my part, I am very glad we meet again."

"I am delighted, sir, to welcome you to my father's house," said Edgar, compelling himself with all the strength of will he possessed to speak in a slow and even tone. "My father will be here soon, and as glad as I am to welcome you."

"Why, Edgar, you didn't tell us that you knew Mr. McGrath?" exclaimed Adelaide, looking from one to the other of the two men, in surprise.

"My darling, how could I? You never spoke of the gentleman as Mr. McGrath; but always as——"

"Oh, Mr. McGrath! how do you do?" said Helen, coming forward hastily, "these good people have quite forgotten me—but I hope you haven't?"

Mr. McGrath gallantly replied that such a freak of memory would be impossible to any one, but particularly

so to him, while Adelaide caught her husband's arm convulsively, and drew him into the farthest corner of the room.

"Oh, you dear, stupid fellow," she whispered, "another moment, and you would have said we always spoke of him as Helen's sweetheart! Do have a little consideration."

Edgar, grateful for the diversion he had succeeded in making, gladly remained in the distant corner where his wife had drawn him, and while he listened to the low murmur of her conversation, gathered his scattered faculties, and thought over the possibilities of his present very trying situation. Lawyer McGrath—Elise's lawyer—actually in the same house with him, and probably to be domiciled as a guest, for some unknown time—what were the possible consequences?

Anything—everything, most terrible to the happiness of his future, unless they at once came to a distinct understanding with each other. For the present moment, of course, he was safe—he had just been told by Adelaide that she was now his wife—and, being a lawyer, of course, he would be silent; and whatever he might do, it would not be done in a hurry. On the other hand, why should Mr. McGrath wish to injure him at all?—he had been guilty of nothing except the indecorum of marrying too speedily after his first wife's death—for of course the lawyer must be aware of Elise's sad fate. Would it not be better to throw himself on the lawyer's generosity in regard to keeping all knowledge of Elise's secret from Adelaide, which was his only trouble? and to make it to McGrath's interest to be friendly, Edgar determined to engage him for his own lawyer, and give him the full direction of his Canadian affairs. His heart grew lighter as he reached this conclusion, and the more he dwelt on it, the more easy and matter-of-course it seemed. McGrath knew of Elise's death—therefore he knew that Edgar was heir to the property which had become hers; and how easily it could be made to the lawyer's interest to so manage the affair that Edgar could take possession without occasioning any scandal or newspaper talk. He breathed quite freely, now, a weight seemed lifted from his breast, and a tightness and compres-

sion about the throat which had almost kept him from speaking, disappeared. He chatted and laughed with his wife, and then presently left the room in search of his father.

Colonel Dangerfield's greeting to his guest was hearty and sincere.

"Of course you have come to stay with us for a time?" he added.

"For a few days, if you will allow me, sir, I shall be most happy to avail myself of your hospitality. Business has brought me into this locality—business about the affairs of a client of mine; and since you are so good I shall make your house my headquarters. It will really accommodate me very much to do so."

"That's right," Colonel Dangerfield replied. "There are few men whom I could make as welcome."

Mr. McGrath bowed his thanks, but it is to be feared he felt no twinge of conscience at the business which had brought him there. He was an honorable gentleman—but then, you see, he was also a lawyer.

While he talked with them all, he managed to direct most of his glances toward Adelaide.

"By heavens! she is magnificent," thought the lawyer. "I admired her first when I saw her in Philadelphia; but here, in her own home, she is superb. Poor little Elise! it is no wonder the sight of her blotted out your pretty face. And that scamp adores her. Yes, he's quite in earnest; he worships the woman, and yet she isn't in love with him, either, though she doesn't know it. The punishment will be all he deserves, if she ever learns the truth;—while for her—By heaven! I'm sorry for the girl. It will quench the light in those proud eyes if she ever learns that she is only Edgar Dangerfield's—bah! I can't even think the word. I shouldn't in the least wonder if she kills the villain, and serve him right, too!"

Edgar took the first favorable opportunity of speaking with the lawyer. It was after dinner, and as they walked in the garden, smoking an evening cigar. He was careful to look about and assure himself that there was no danger of eavesdroppers, and then he came to the subject at once.

“Mr. McGrath, I suppose you were surprised to find me married again—so soon?”

The lawyer smiled.

“One could scarcely feel much surprise, Mr. Dangerfield, after seeing the lady.”

“Ah! thank you for taking that view of it. My wife’s beauty and goodness are, I think, a sufficient excuse for almost anything.”

“Quite so—quite so,” assented the lawyer.

“Poor little Elise! I suppose Allan told you the particulars of her terrible death?”

“Poor child—poor child! The burning house!—yes, I heard of it.”

“I asked Allan to inform you. I could not write about it at the time. It was too shocking.”

“Very—very shocking, indeed! The feeling did you credit.”

“But, Mr. McGrath,” Edgar began, somewhat hesitatingly, “as a man of the world and my legal adviser, if you will be so good, of course you will understand my feelings when I beg that Mrs. Dangerfield may remain in ignorance of my previous marriage?”

“Oh, my dear Mr. Dangerfield, be quite at ease on that subject. I flatter myself I am a man of discretion.”

He bowed profoundly, with his hand on his heart, and Edgar thanked him.

CHAPTER XII.

MRS. DANGERFIELD’S NEW MAID.

MR. McGRATH was assigned a room in the western wing of the house, seldom used, and from Helen he received the laughing information it was haunted.

“By an angel, if the ghost is feminine—judging by the rest of the ladies in the house,” returned the gallant lawyer.

“Well, by this time I daresay she may be, although she had the reputation of being quite the reverse when she was on earth. She was my great-grandmother, and a dreadfully cross old lady.”

“How unlike her fair descendant!” exclaimed the lawyer,

as he took his candle from her hand, and with a general "good-night," retired to his room.

And there, as he unpacked his small traveling-valise, and carefully laid out his snowy linen, he also drew from the bottom of the bag a letter. It was written in the round, school-girl hand of a person not yet proficient in the art of chirography; but Mr. McGrath had no difficulty in making out its contents, for the handwriting was familiar to him.

TORONTO, June 3d.

"MY DEAR FRIEND:—If you have wondered at not hearing from me sooner, know that it was because I have been at the point of death since the morning I bade you good-by. Oh, why did I not die? I was greatly hurt in the railroad accident of that day; but unfortunately I was not killed. I arrived here three days ago, and I find that he believes me dead—I am supposed to have been burned to death in my house which was burned down the evening of the day I went to Montreal. From what I hear, I suppose the woman who was killed was my unfortunate servant, who must have been dressed in my clothes. He is already married again—I saw his marriage to that woman, his cousin, in an American paper of this date. Oh, how do I live? but I don't feel that I am alive—I feel like a human machine, who has but one hope, one wish, one idea left; and that is to get back my marriage certificate, and to be revenged on the woman who has robbed me of my husband. If he did not destroy it at once, I feel sure that he will not destroy it now at all, because there is no occasion, and it will be of value to him. How I am to proceed in order to recover it I don't know—but there must be a way, and I will find it out. In the meantime, my will is made—for should I yet die, or be killed before I regain possession of that paper, he shall not profit by my death. The will is properly drawn out and attested by a lawyer in this city, whom you know, and who has orders to give it to you. I have made you, dear friend, my heir, for it seemed just to me, that you, who have been my best friend, and have worked so hard for me, should reap such benefit as there may be to come from my death. I have a presentiment that I will not live long—I live now only to redeem the honor of my name, and to be revenged

on the woman I hate. When I have any news of importance to communicate I will write.

“Faithfully yours,

“ELISE DANGERFIELD.”

Something very like a tear glistened in McGrath's eye when he folded up the letter again and returned it to its place. He carefully locked up his valise, and with a grim smile, placed the key under his pillow.

“I am a light sleeper Edgar Dangerfield,” he said to himself. “I don't think you will abstract any papers from me. The scoundrel—I have no doubt but he has the certificate safe enough—his confidential talk to me is a sufficient proof of that; and before long he will tell me of it, for I see plainly enough what he's driving at.”

Lawyer McGrath judged Edgar correctly; before the close of the next day he broached the subject of Elise's inheritance.

“Very true,” said the lawyer, having listened attentively to all he had to say, “what you say is correct enough, Mr. Dangerfield, you are the unfortunate girl's heir; but unhappily there is no proof of your marriage with her, and although I know of her marriage to you, I also am without a written proof of it.”

“But I have the proof, Mr. McGrath—all the proof that is necessary—I have her marriage certificate,” said Edgar, eagerly.

“Ah, is it possible? Then it was not destroyed. I supposed, of course, it had been burned up in the fire.”

“It would have been,” returned Edgar, with an effort of brazen impudence, looking the lawyer straight in the face, “had not Elise given it to me the night before. I had some idea of breaking the news of my marriage to my father by showing him the certificate, and having it over at once.”

Never in his life had McGrath found such difficulty in maintaining an unchanged expression of countenance. But he returned, quietly:

“That would have been breaking the news with a vengeance—a complete smash, I should say. However, it is most fortunate that you have the necessary proof of your past marriage—that makes everything comparatively easy.”

“It is safe, and will remain so: but I don't care to push the matter at present. As soon as I am ready to move in the affair I will come to you in Montreal, and bring the paper with me.”

Mr. McGrath was disappointed, for he had hoped to get Elise's certificate into his possession before he left the house; but he saw that it would be dangerous to urge the matter, for fear of rousing Edgar's suspicions, for it was clearly evident that he absolutely trembled, for the present, at letting the paper out of his possession, and risking the most remote chance of Adelaide discovering its existence. But McGrath's chief object was gained in finding that the certificate was safe—that it would remain so was a matter of course; and being now looked upon by Edgar as his legal adviser, he felt quite sure that the paper would ultimately come into his hands.

He improvised various expeditions for himself in and about Dangerfield, and a day or two afterward announced that his business was completed, and that he must return to Montreal. Every one was loud in expressions of regret; but Edgar was really glad to have him go. Mrs. Dangerfield, however, invited him cordially to visit them again at his earliest convenience, for Mr. McGrath had the ability to make himself an interesting and welcome guest. While he still stood making *adieux*, a servant appeared, and in a low tone, said to Adelaide:

“A young woman as wants to see you, ma'am—she says she's come about the advertisement.”

“Oh, an applicant at last!” exclaimed Adelaide, turning to Helen. “Very well, Mary, show the young woman up to my room, and take care of her there till I come.”

Mr. McGrath cut short his *adieux*, took up his valise, and bowed himself out of the room. Edgar, who had volunteered to drive him to the depot, preceded him, and as he ran rapidly down stairs almost tumbled over a young woman who was slowly ascending them. She was dressed in somber black, and heavily veiled. Lawyer McGrath, who followed Edgar in a more subdued manner, turned for a moment as he passed the young woman on the stairs, and looked after her.

“Now, that is strange,” he thought, “but there is something familiar in that girl’s figure and movement. I wish I could have seen her face.”

He continued his way down-stairs, and the object of his thoughts continued her way to Mrs. Dangerfield’s room, as she had been directed. But if Lawyer McGrath could have seen that veiled face uncovered, he would have found it far less familiar than the figure had seemed.

Mrs. Dangerfield did not keep the new arrival waiting. She went to her room at once, feeling some curiosity to see what this applicant, who answered such an unusual advertisement, was like. She found Mary in the hall, apparently guarding the door; and when she entered the room, she found the new-comer standing almost in the middle of the room, the light from the window striking directly on her face, for she had put aside her veil.

Mrs. Dangerfield almost started, and felt something like a thrill of repugnance as her glance fell upon that face. The girl was certainly peculiar-looking. She was not merely pale, but pallid—of a grey, ashen pallor, like death. Her very lips were pale, thin, and closely compressed; and across the upper one ran a deep line that might have been a scar, but which produced the effect of a hare-lip; across one lip ran a deep, livid scar, completely destroying a contour which must originally have been both delicate and pretty. A similar scar disfigured one side of the forehead, and spoiled the line of the eyebrow. Of the whole face—which, notwithstanding its ugliness, seemed to suggest previous beauty—but one feature remained attractive. The eyes were large, long, and very dark, but their expression was strange—they fixed themselves on Mrs. Dangerfield with a hard, steely glare, that seemed to go through her like a knife.

“She will never do,” thought the lady, “whatever her accomplishments as a waiting-maid may be, if she stares at me in that way.”

She motioned her to a seat, and then, taking a chair at some distance, continued her observations of her personal appearance while she questioned her, from time to time

looking at her attentively, and then glancing away through the window as she spoke.

"It is in answer to the advertisement that you come?" she asked.

"Yes, madam."

The voice was clear and distinct, but hard and cold.

"What is your name?"

"Hanna Dexter."

"Have you been a servant long?"

"For thirteen years, madam."

"Dear me! So long—you don't look very old."

"I am twenty-one, madame."

"Oh, then you must have begun at a very early age," with a slight smile.

"I began at a very early age, madam," in a low, harsh voice, the girl answered.

"Then of course you are quite experienced, Hanna?"

"I think you will find me so, madam, if you will be good enough to engage me. I am quite experienced as a lady's maid; I can sew well, and I can dress hair very well."

"I suppose you have brought references?"

"This is my reference from the last place—it is from a well-known hair-dresser in New York City. I was there but a short time; but I can give other references, if necessary."

"This is quite sufficient," returned Mrs. Dangerfield, as she read the paper, "since I happen to know this person. You are aware that I am particular in other matters besides, proficiency. You mustn't speak French."

"I never speak French, madam."

"And you must promise not to marry, or become engaged while you are in my service," Mrs. Dangerfield added, laughing.

"I shall never marry, madam," Hanna Dexter returned, gravely.

"Then you may consider yourself engaged, for the present. I will try how we get along together for a month."

"Thank you, madam—I would like to ask for two privileges before I am absolutely engaged. I must have a room

to myself; and I would like to have a couple of hours quiet to myself, one day each week."

"Well, that's reasonable enough, Hanna, and as for your room—the house is large enough—you can have a room to yourself. Is that all?"

"Thank you, madam, that is all."

"Very well; Mary," Mrs. Dangerfield called, and the girl, who was still in the hall, entered. "You will take Hanna to the little room in the western wing—that is to be her room; and Hanna, you will come to me an hour from now to dress my hair. I shall not want you sooner."

Hanna bowed, and followed her fellow-servant from the room.

"What a very strange looking person!" Mrs. Dangerfield thought. "She is unlike enough to her predecessors. What a curious effect her blonde hair and eyebrows have with those dark eyes, and such a brunette skin; and why does her face haunt me as if I had seen it somewhere, under very painful circumstances? But, pshaw! that is impossible nonsense!"

When Mrs. Dangerfield's new maid entered, at the appointed hour, to dress her mistress for dinner, Adelaide was even more struck with her appearance.

Her close-fitting black dress showed a slight figure, thin almost to attenuation; she wore a pretty, white muslin cap, which quite concealed her hair except just a rippling line across the brow of a very blonde, indeed, a pale straw-color, and the contrast with her eyes, and dark pallor, was very marked. Edgar, who was present, did not look at Hanna at all, for he seldom looked at servants, whom he regarded as mere domestic machines. Apparently the new maid did not see her new master, either, being wholly occupied in brushing out the rich, nut-brown tresses of her mistress, and arranging them in a superb classic coil at the back of her head. Edgar stood on the opposite side of his wife's chair, one arm leaning on the back of it, while he spoke to her in low, lover-like tones. When the toilet was completed, he led her to a long mirror, and she glanced into it, and nodded at her own reflection. That one look convinced her that her new maid was a treasure,

“Yes, she will do,” thought Adelaide, “when she gets over that dreadful habit of staring at me.”

She placed her hand on Edgar’s arm, and they went down to dinner. As the fair woman’s trailing and glistening robes disappeared, and the door closed after her, the waiting-maid’s eyes blazed as if they actually shot forth flame; but as she turned toward the chair where Edgar’s arm had leaned a sudden mist clouded them. She bent her head with a long, dry sob, and pressed her scarred and livid lips passionately against the crimson velvet where his hand had rested.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE SHADOW OF THE CURSE.

ONE day a trifling accident caused Edgar Dangerfield to observe his wife’s maid; it was the first time he had looked at her, and as he did so, he was conscious of a vague sensation of alarm. Why he should feel alarmed because a pale, dark-eyed girl met his glance with a look that seemed not even to see him, was surprising and discomfiting; and with his characteristic dislike of anything that was unpleasant, Edgar dismissed the feeling. But in the course of the day it returned again and again; and when Hanna was in the same room with him, as often happened, for Edgar was nearly always with Adelaide, the shadow of some impending calamity seemed to fall upon him. He took occasion to look at the girl more observingly than he had yet done. What was there about this thin, pale, slender young woman that impressed him as being strangely familiar? had he ever seen her before? He could have sworn that he had never beheld her until her appearance beneath this roof—then what was it about her that haunted him with that curious, that strangely familiar look, as if of some one he had seen a thousand times—some one who had been often near to him?—ah, it was the eyes! He recognized it suddenly—they were strangely like, and yet unlike, the eyes of Elise! That unfortunate girl! He had forgotten her—yes, except when something, as for instance, the unexpected appearance of McGrath, occurred to bring the past forc-

ibly to his memory. Edgar had forgotten that Elise had ever existed; but, now, looking at the waiting-maid, he could see that her eyes had the color and the peculiar shape of the dead woman's. How confoundedly provoking! He should never be able to see the girl, now, without being reminded of Elise—it was too bad, and he was determined not to stand it. But why should he?—Adelaide could get another waiting-maid—the article was sufficiently plenty; why should he be annoyed with the presence of one that was unpleasant to him?

“Adelaide,” he said, when Hanna presently left the room on an errand for her mistress, “I don't like that girl—I wish you would get rid of her.”

“Get rid of Hanna? Why, Edgar, what has she done to you?”

“I didn't say that she had done anything,” returned Edgar, peevishly, “I don't like her looks; that's all.”

“Well, she is peculiar looking,” Mrs. Dangerfield assented, “but then, surely my waiting-maid is not bound to please you with her looks, sir!” she continued, playfully; “if I am satisfied, surely that should be enough.”

“Are you satisfied, then?”

“Entirely. I never was half so much pleased with any maid—she's a perfect treasure. I don't have to tell her what to do, even—she seems to know intuitively.”

“Then, of course, it would be useless to beg you to part with such a treasure merely to please me,” said Edgar, not prepared for the answer, however.

“Quite useless,” laughed Adelaide.

Edgar bit his lips with vexation; and Elise having been so recently in his thoughts, he remembered for one fleeting instant with what loving devotion she would have sacrificed anything or anybody to his lightest whim. He thought his wife selfish and unkind to refuse him the first favor he had ever asked; but he was still far too much in love to say so, and not wishing to make matters worse he presently left the room to avoid saying an angry word in reply.

Adelaide looked after him with a pitying smile.

“Poor Edgar!” she thought; “now is he really such a

goose as to be angry? If he had asked me some great and difficult service of me, how gladly I would have done it. But to expect of me to discharge the most perfect waiting maid in the world merely to satisfy a whim—pshaw! it is too ridiculous!”

If Edgar considered he had sufficient cause for dissatisfaction with his wife, he had quite forgotten it by dinner time; and he entered her room to lead her down to dinner with all his customary lover-like devotion. But the sight of Hanna adorning her mistress' hair with lovely crimson roses seemed to remind him again of a subject that did not add to his comfort; and although the girl did not look up, there was still some familiar appearance and the same suggestion of Elise about her.

Edgar sat down sulkily, and regarded Hanna with a fixed, angry look.

She was, indeed, peculiar—ugly and repulsive, Edgar thought her. Why should she remind him of Elise, who had been sweet and pretty, poor little thing, in her day? This girl was pallid as a corpse, with scarred, disfigured countenance, and hair of a pale straw color. Elise had been blooming as a rose, with a fresh, round, baby face, and magnificent black hair, whose beauty and luxuriance even outshone that of the queenly Adelaide. This girl, too, was as thin as a skeleton, with none of the graceful curves and rounded outlines of Elise's rounded figure—above all, Elise was dead and sleeping in her quiet grave, happily for him, more happily still for herself. What stupid fancy had led him to find in this hideous waiting-maid any resemblance to that ill-fated girl? Pooh! It was ridiculous, although the eyes had that strange resemblance; but there was nothing supprising in it, since nature was full of such repetitions.

Hanna trembled under his fixed stare, and the roses dropped from her fingers. Edgar started forward and raised them from the carpet, and as the waiting-maid had stooped for the same purpose their hands met for a single instant. The girl drew back, as if his hand had been fire, and burned her; she was pale before, but now she became ashy white even to her lips, and she trembled convulsively

from head to foot. Edgar took no notice of her. He was quite unconscious of having touched her hand.

“Go away!” he said, harshly, “you are awkward;” and then turning to Adelaide: “Let me place the roses for you, darling,” and with skilful fingers he arranged the flowers in her hair, then stooping over her, kissed her cheek, that blushed as brightly as the roses.

Hanna stood by, waiting for her mistress to speak.

“You may go now,” Mrs. Dangerfield said, taking her husband’s arm.

Hanna obeyed. Once outside the door, she almost flew to her own room, the door of which she locked and bolted when she entered. She could no longer support her own weight, and tottered to the bed, where she fell, a shapeless heap, only shaken from time to time with low, deep sobs.

By and by Hanna’s mood changed. She arose and sat erect, fiercely wiping the traces of tears from her face, and pushed back the hair from her brow. In doing so she displaced the white muslin cap from her head, and it fell to the floor, and she fiercely stamped upon it, then took it up, looking for a moment as if she would tear it to pieces.

“Fool!” she muttered. “Will I never learn calmness and self-control? how often has he told me that it was the first lesson a lady should learn; ha—ha—ha! and am I not a lady now?”

She carefully smoothed out her white muslin cap, and with deft fingers moulded it into shape; then bathed her face, removing all the traces of her recent tears.

“Come,” she said, with a bitter sneer, “let me look on my own loveliness.”

She stood before the mirror and carefully brushed out her short blonde hair; it curled slightly, and clustered in pretty, natural waves over her brow and temples. She put on her cap, adjusted her collar and cuffs, and settled the folds of her white muslin apron.

“You are a fair creature,” she continued, in reckless mockery, to her own reflection in the mirror, “a peerless rival to the beautiful woman whose hair you could not sufficiently adorn with roses. You must be less awkward, Mistress Hanna, or else you will fail even as a wait-

ing-maid! Oh, God! how shall I bear it? Now, fool, what are you about again? More tears, more fine feelings! Away with them—they are not for you, Hanna—for you only a heart of stone and a face of marble. Or if you must have feelings now and then, bury them all here.”

She unlocked a drawer of her bureau, and drew out a black-covered little book, a cheap memorandum book it was, and all the front pages were closely covered with writing.

Hanna read over all that was written, and then drew toward her writing materials, and poured forth on the white pages the unuttered anguish of her overflowing heart.

HANNA'S JOURNAL.

JUNE 11th, 1876.—This is the end of my third day in Dangerfield Mansion. My disguise has proved sufficient. It is sufficient even to myself—the blonde hair makes a very great difference; it would have changed me very much even if my face had been as it used to be when he knew it. But deformed and scarred as it is, even I can no longer recognize it for what it once was. Well, I have seen her—I have looked on her till the picture of her lovely face seems burned upon my eyeballs.

She is beautiful—oh, how beautiful, and he adores her! I can see that in every look he bends upon her, and I can see that he never loved me—no, never! For he never looked at me as I have seen him look at her. At the best I but pleased his fancy for a little while. But he would have loved me better than any one else, if he had never seen her; better than his fair, sweet sister, better than his proud old father. And it is for that I hate her—oh, how I hate her!

When I am brushing her beautiful hair, or fastening the buttons of her grand dresses, my fingers ache and throb sometimes to strangle her—to tear the ivory whiteness of her skin—to strike with the back of the hair-brush those velvety cheeks, soft and fresh as damask-roses. But I can do better than that, if I can only learn patience!

Ah, yes! if I can keep down my throbbing, bursting heart, so that it will not betray me, I shall yet recover the certificate of my marriage with Edgar Dangerfield, and then I shall triumph; for with that in my hand I will say: “Now,

madam, leave my husband's house—you have had your day—my time has come! Ha! he loves you, does he! Very likely! But *I* am his wife, you have no legal title to him!”

Oh, for the power to say these words to her—to see that haughty brow flush red with shame, and those proud eyes sink to the earth before me. Yes, it would be worth all that I suffer now—it will be worth all the rest of life to me. And that triumph will be mine—I feel that it will be mine; for I am convinced that the certificate of my marriage is safe—I could see that it was so when I saw McGrath's face. But where? In this house somewhere, I am sure; and if ever patience and perseverance succeeded, they shall succeed now; for I will bear my burden unflinchingly, if I have to tear my heart out to do it.

June 12th.—I am thankful that I learned how to write, and how to express my thoughts in writing. But for this vent to my feelings my heart would burst. Within this hour I nearly betrayed myself, and almost ruined my scheme forever. When he spoke those harsh and cruel words to me, then turned and kissed that lovely woman, I felt that I must scream out: “Not her—not her—Edgar, kiss me—I am your wife!” oh, I felt that I must say this, or die! But I clinched my teeth and bit my tongue that should be silent; and yet I didn't die! Oh, how much agony a woman can bear and live! I think nothing can kill me now—for I have borne enough to kill ten women. Presently my mistress, Mrs. Dangerfield—*my mistress, Mrs. Dangerfield*, oh, peace, rebelling heart, don't play the traitor now, for your time will come, it *shall* come! Well, presently she said that I might go, and bade me leave the room; very gently she said it, for she is always a lady, gentle and sweet and gracious. And I do hate her for it; yes, I hate her gentle, dignified, lady-like ways; I hate her low, sweet voice: I hate her gracious, refined manner, and that lofty air that grand folks call good-breeding, for it makes me feel low and mean, and just as if I was only fit to be her servant. I used to be a good girl once; I did my duty by those I served; I only asked that I might have something to love. Edgar came to me—I did not seek him; and when he asked me to love him was I so very wrong that I did so? I loved him—

oh, poor bleeding heart, how I loved him! And I know that at one kind word, one look, I would love him again. But he did not look at me at all until to-day; and when his eyes were hard and cruel—I never saw him look like that. And when he spoke to me his words, his tones, were like knives cutting into my heart. But I will bear it all; only I must bear it better than I did to-day, or else my secret will escape me, and already there is something strange in the way Edgar looked at me to-day. There was in his eyes an expression that looked like recognition; and not so much that as if he was striving to remember! Surely he cannot suspect me—no, for he believes me dead. In that belief lies my best protection. But I am as far as ever from success in the object of my search. I have not yet even discovered his keys; and until I gain possession of them, I cannot begin my search.

CHAPTER XIV.

A BUNCH OF KEYS.

A PORTION of Hanna's duties was to keep Mrs. Dangerfield's bureaus, wardrobes, etc., in order, and for this purpose she was trusted with the keys—which were required of her each night when she retired to her room. Mrs. Dangerfield was not an exacting mistress, and Hanna usually retired to rest at about ten o'clock, and being a person who required scant allowance of sleep a great part of the night was her own to do with as she pleased. The girl read, wrote, or sewed, according as she was disposed, but whatever she chose to do, she was pretty certain of never being called upon by any member of the family later than ten o'clock. With her fellow-servants she was no favorite; for she never exchanged words with them beyond a civil salutation in the morning, and an occasional remark at meal-time.

It was evident from the first day that Hanna took charge of Mrs. Dangerfield's apartment that she was in quest of something—it was equally evident, after she had examined every pocket in every dress; every drawer in each bureau; every box and jewel-case, every nook, corner, crevice of whatever description the room contained, that she could

not find it; and indeed, Hanna scarcely hoped to find what she sought among Mrs. Dangerfield's possessions. It was not likely that a husband who had a secret to keep, would leave the key of it where his wife could find it.

Edgar's dressing-room opened off the sleeping apartment to the left side, and Adelaide's to the right. Of course, Hanna was aware of this; but she had not yet ventured to invade Edgar's private room. She observed even that Mrs. Dangerfield did not take such a liberty; but Hanna refrained from different motives. She had not yet had a fitting opportunity, and she was afraid to make the attempt, for, of course, she dared not risk discovery. Edgar, his wife and Helen went to New York one day to bid adieu to some friends bound for Europe; and Hanna was left alone in Mrs. Dangerfield's room with orders to change the trimming on a certain dress to be worn that evening. The waiting-maid employed herself on the allotted task long enough to feel sure that there was no danger of return on the part of her mistress, and then, knowing herself to be secure for several hours, she cast away her work, and boldly approached the door of Edgar's dressing-room.

She found it unlocked; she pushed it and entered, and then for over an hour she pursued her search, noiselessly and with extreme care. But to a looker-on her proceedings must have seemed most strange. She opened and ransacked all the bureau drawers, at times touching Edgar's garments with a gentleness almost reverential, often pressing them passionately to her lips, and then thrusting them angrily away as if suddenly tempted to rend them to pieces. She examined every pocket in each article of wearing apparel that she took up; and now and then she found a delicately-perfumed handkerchief, or a dainty pair of gloves belonging to Adelaide, and these articles she thrust back again as if a scorpion had stung her. But she found no keys, and at last her search ended, leaving her listless, hopeless and weary.

"Everything is against me," she murmured, "everything. But I *will not* give up!"

She returned to her work, and with closely compressed lips bent her face over it, and steadily applied her needle

to the task of rearranging Mrs. Dangerfield's lace trimmings.

That night, when Adelaide returned and Hanna assisted to dress her in the newly trimmed robe, the lady was profuse in complimenting the waiting-maid's skill. It was already late, and dinner had been kept much beyond the customary hour, so when she was dressed Mrs. Dangerfield called out:

"Come, Edgar!" and hastened on without waiting for him. At the head of the staircase her dress caught in a loose stair-rod, and with an involuntary cry she seized the baluster. She was neither hurt nor in danger, but Edgar, who was only a step behind her, bounded forward and caught her in his arms.

"My darling!" he cried, in a voice of alarm.

Hanna glided forward, too, but it was not anxiety for her mistress that moved her, although she said:

"Are you hurt, ma'am?"

"Not at all," returned the lady, as she took her husband's arm, and went merrily down-stairs. Hanna waited, looking after them, until they had entered the dining-room. Then she stooped swiftly and groped on the stairs for something. When Edgar had bounded forward, her quick ears had detected a rattling fall of something quite distinct from the clatter made by the stair-rod. She groped for that something now on the first step, then on the second; and in another instant it was in their hands.

"I have it!" she thought, exultantly. "It is a bunch of keys!"

To reach her own room and lock herself in was but the work of a moment. She knew exactly what to do, for her preparations were made in the hope of just what had happened; for she was well aware that at whatever time Edgar's keys might come into her hands, there was no safety in keeping them more than five minutes. She counted them first; there were five, of various sizes, and all quite different in shape.

She hastily took an impression on wax, and having assured herself that each impression was perfect, she put her treasure away; and then carefully examined each separate

key to make quite certain that not the slightest evidence remained of what she had done. Being quite satisfied on that point, she carried the bunch of keys, and placed them in the very spot where she had found them.

On the following day it chanced that Edgar found himself alone with Hanna. It had not before happened since the young woman had been in the house; and yet it was the most simple and natural thing in the world that it should happen. Adelaide was one of those ladies who, when she had a maid, was entirely dependent on her. If her hair required a pin, if her handkerchief needed scent, if she tore her glove, her maid was called for; and although Edgar was nearly always present, and ready to do any amount of waiting on her, it was not sufficient. Hanna's presence seemed indispensable. At present Hanna was sewing a button on Mrs. Dangerfield's riding gauntlet, and that fair lady had taken a sudden fancy to try a new song while she waited.

"This isn't the one!" she suddenly exclaimed, tossing the music from the piano. "Where is that new song I bought yesterday! Now I remember, Helen has it," and catching up her riding skirt over her arm, she ran away for it, before Edgar could offer to get it for her.

It might have been fancy, but Edgar felt, the moment he was left alone with Hanna, a return of the same indescribable chill apprehension which seemed to fall on him like the shadow of impending evil the first time he met her eyes.

"What can it be? Perhaps she has the evil eye!" he thought. "If I believed in such superstitions I would be inclined to think she was one of that sort. She is a very strange looking creature—she doesn't look like a living woman. Her face is corpse-like, and her eyes have a positive glare. I've seen her look so at Adelaide. And why does she remind me of Elise? There is no resemblance, and yet I cannot look at her without thinking of the other. Had Elise a sister, I wonder? but pshaw! I know right well she had not, nor any relative, and this woman doesn't look at all like Elise, either, What keeps Adelaide?"

He turned to the piano, whistling an air, and keeping

time to it on the keys. But something compelled him to turn again and look at Hanna, who had finished sewing on the button, and stood looking out of the window on to the lawn, her face turned in profile toward him; and though the profile was thinner and sharper than he remembered, it was unquestionably like that of Elise. He recognized the likeness and shuddered.

“Am I losing my wits about this hideous young woman?” he asked himself, for a weird, ghostly idea took possession of his fancy. “Can there be truth in what Pythagoras declared regarding the transmigration of souls? When I meet that girl’s eyes I am half inclined to believe that the soul of Elise looks through them to haunt me. Stuff! I am growing very tender of conscience considering I have no crime to charge myself with. If it is the ghost of Elise I will try it,” he thought, recklessly, and turning again to the piano, he played the accompaniment to the Canadian Boat song, singing the words in a rich, clear voice.

He had taught the song to Elise in the days of their courtship, and they had often sung it together.

He kept his gaze fixed on Hanna while he sang: but the girl did not move an eyelash, nor, when he said, speaking in French:

“Do you remember the words or the music?” did she turn toward him or give the least token of having heard him.

“Did you hear me, Hanna? I spoke to you,” said Edgar, sharply, in English.

“To me, sir?” replied Hanna, turning toward him. “I didn’t hear you, sir.”

Her voice sounded hard and cold as usual, and her face showed no more trace of emotion than a face of marble.

“You must have heard me, though I spoke in French.”

“But I never speak French,” returned Hanna.

“Of course not,” returned Adelaide, entering in time to catch the last words. “Don’t you remember, Edgar, it was one of my special stipulations that I would not have a maid who spoke French? Have you sewed on the button, Hanna? Come, Edgar, the horses are waiting, and impatient. Hanna, you asked for permission to go to the city;

you may have the afternoon—I shall not need you again to-day.”

“I wish she might break her neck,” was Edgar’s charitable thought, as the girl bowed and left the room. “What a fool she makes me feel. I hate her. But one thing is certain, there is not even the ghost of poor Elise in her, or she never could have heard that song unmoved. I believe I am half mad to let such absurd fancies enter my heart.”

Adelaide looked sharply at Edgar when he helped her to the saddle.

“Is anything the matter, dear?” she asked. “You really look ill.”

“It is that confounded maid of yours. I can’t endure the woman, Adelaide; the sight of her makes me sick. I do wish you could be induced to send her away, dearest.”

“Oh! is that all? You mustn’t take such silly fancies, Edgar, it is quite impossible for me to get on without Hanna. Come, a good canter will put all such nonsense out of your head.”

Edgar touched his horse with the spur, but made no answer. He mentally determined never again to speak to his wife on the subject of the obnoxious servant; but he also determined to find a means of getting rid of Hanna.

It was late in the evening when the waiting-maid returned from the city, and having been told that her mistress would not require her services any farther that day, Hanna retired to her own room. She dressed herself in a light wrapper of a soft, clinging material, which made no sound when she moved about; and having removed her walking boots she replaced them with a pair of list slippers. Then she read her journal, and made some trifling entries in it. She was very calm and composed, much more so than she had ever been when alone since she had lived beneath the roof of the Dangerfields.

She drew a letter from the pocket of the dress she had worn, and read it two or three times over. She had received it that day, at the address in the city which was known to her only correspondent. The letter was very short, but afforded her inexpressible relief and satisfaction. It read thus:

MY POOR CHILD:

At last I have one crumb of comfort for you. The certificate of your marriage still exists, and is safe. You were right in your supposition. He expects to inherit your property as your husband, and will take good care of the necessary proof. I am retained as counsel to work up the case. Try to find some little consolation in this, for I assure you from my heart you shall yet have justice done to you.

Ever your friend,

WILLIAM McGRATH.

Hanna enclosed the letter in her journal, and locked it up. She then counted the keys on a blue ribbon which she held in her hand. They were five in number, and the exact counterpart of Edgar Dangerfield's keys. She tied them loosely and securely together, and hid them within the bosom of her dress. Then she put out her candle, and lay down on the bed. It was now about eleven o'clock, but she didn't sleep. She lay with wide eyes, watching the moonlight steal through the parted curtains as the moon slowly climbed the sky; and long past midnight, when every soul in the house was fast locked in sleep—except herself—Hanna arose, and with a small, dark lantern concealed in the folds of her dress, stole noiselessly from her room, and down the wide, old-fashioned staircase. The moonlight flooded the hall, and she glided close to the wall like a shadow. At the door of the library she paused, and for a moment listened; then softly turned the handle and entered the room.

 CHAPTER XV.

DOES THE GHOST WALK?

HANNA DEXTER closed the door upon herself, and slowly turned the key in the lock. She dared not risk discovery, and if by any fatal chance some one should come to the library door, she must have the opportunity to coin some explanation for her presence there. There was but a chance out of a hundred that she would be disturbed, and that did not unnerve her; the possible danger calmed and concen-

trated her energies, and gave her the courage of the desperate.

She had before this taken more than one opportunity to note well the contents of the library, and she knew that it contained, among other articles of a similar nature, an old-fashioned black walnut desk—Edgar's especial property, and in which, as she rightly guessed, he kept his private papers.

She noiselessly drew up an old, high-backed chair in front of the desk, turned the light of her lantern upon it, and tried the lock with her keys. The third key turned the lock, and the desk was open. Hanna's heart beat so loudly that that it almost seemed for some moments as if the noise of it must be heard in the dead silence of that room, and her fingers trembled so that the keys rattled in her grasp.

But she commanded herself, and having restored the bunch of keys to the folds of her dress, she set down the lamp on the table of the desk, which opened outwards, and began to search the drawers and pigeon-holes for the paper she was in quest of. All the papers she found were in Edgar's handwriting, and the temptation to read them was very great; but she dared not do so and thereby waste time which was so precious to her.

She felt no scruple about reading Edgar's papers, even of the most private character, for she had not been brought up in a manner to give her a just appreciation of such niceties of behavior; and besides, even if she had felt a native delicacy about prying into matters which were never intended for her eyes, her position in this household, and the manner in which she had been treated, were surely a sufficient excuse to her for any liberty she could take with his private papers.

So it was the danger of wasting time, and no other consideration that withheld Mrs. Dangerfield's maid from making herself thoroughly acquainted with the private correspondence of Mrs. Dangerfield's husband. Hanna simply unfolded every letter and paper that came to her hand, glanced at their contents, then refolded and returned them to their places: but as she did so, and still failed to discover the one she sought, her face grew paler and paler, and the

eager, expectant expression she had worn at first, hardened into stony disappointment.

At last every drawer, every nook in the secretary had been ransacked and carefully examined, but without success. One hope remained. Among the many papers she had turned over she had come on two separate little packages enclosed in scarlet envelopes, on each of which was written across the back, "Private Papers and Mem., E. D." It was too great a risk to break the envelopes, though she felt convinced that one or the other contained the paper she sought—but ah! if neither contained it? Edgar might go to his desk the very next day, and so discover that his papers had been tampered with. He must suspect her instantly, for already he disliked her, and regarded her with aversion, although she could see that he did not himself quite understand why, and her plans must be carried out quickly and without failure, before his suspicions gathered definite form.

"I will take these with me to my room," she thought. "I must risk something, and in that there is less risk than in breaking the envelope."

She took them both very carefully, lest an indiscreet touch might reveal that they had been handled; and then having noiselessly closed the desk, she locked it, and stole from the room. She could not guess how long she had been there; but it must have been hours, for the moon had gone down, the sky was clouded and the stairs which had been flooded with moonlight when she descended, were now pitch dark. She turned off the light from her lantern, fearing that a stray gleam might betray her to some early or wakeful person; and so, with light and noiseless steps, groped her way up the stairs, and along the passages to her room. One step of the stairs had creaked, and Hanna almost screamed; but she held her hand over her mouth for an instant, and then resolutely went on. She fancied she heard a noise more than once, and, indeed, she did, for Dangerfield Mansion was old, and occasionally in the dead hours of night mysterious crackings and snapping of the furniture or of the woodwork of the house

might often be heard—as every one who has been up and alone in old houses must have observed to be the case.

The least sound, if but the flutter of a summer moth, caused Hanna Dexter to catch her breath, half afraid her breathing might be heard; but at last she was within her own room, safe and undiscovered, and courage and calmness returned. She drew close the curtains of her window, and lighted her candle; and then she examined more closely the sealed packets of papers which she had brought with her. They were enclosed in ordinary gummed envelopes; and Hanna proceeded to soften the gum by breathing upon it. It was a tedious process, but her constancy and perseverance did not flag for a moment; and she was rewarded at the end of ten minutes by finding that she could part the gummed edges, and then with painful slowness, and almost agonizing care she managed to open the envelope without tearing or breaking it, or leaving any trace to show that it had been tampered with. The contents did not repay her trouble. There were three small folded papers within; one was the receipt of a very large bill at a tailor's, another was notes in regard to a survey of land; and the third (will any gentleman believe it?) a recipe for a certain wash warranted to make the hands soft and white. It must be remembered that Edgar Dangerfield was first introduced to your notice as a "beautiful man," and his slender delicate hands were his especial vanity at all times.

Hanna Dexter could not repress a faint groan of disappointment, but she returned the papers and reclosed the envelopes; and then she took up the second sealed packet, and with dogged resolution proceeded to open it in the same manner, and never faltered till she had it unclosed and the contents in her hand. Then, indeed, she did pause a moment, to call up courage for a second disappointment; and this time the disappointment was keener than at first. The second envelope contained the leaves of a withered rose, wrapped in a scented paper; and on the outside the superscription, in a delicate feminine hand-writing: "This for my Edgar—since he is such a goose as to ask it;" and on the inside of the paper was written, in Edgar's well-known writing: "The rose which Adelaide wore on the

night she first kissed me—my darling, my only darling! May 3d.” The slip of paper fell from Hanna’s hand, and the rose-leaves were scattered on her lap and on the floor. A spasm of intense suffering convulsed her face, and forced scalding tears from her eyes.

“Oh, God!” she moaned, “I cannot bear it—I cannot bear it—what shall I do? Heaven—heaven, have a little mercy—oh, give me a little strength—help me to bear it for a little while longer.”

Choking sobs arose and died in her quivering throat; burning tears poured down over her face, and for many minutes her whole being was shaken with deep but noiseless weeping. With an almost superhuman effort she controlled herself, and overcame the outward show of suffering; and when she was quiet again she picked up every scattered rose-leaf, returned them to the papers which had enclosed them, and then sealed them up in their envelope. It was too late, now, to take the risk of returning the two packets to the desk, as she had at first intended, for the morning was already breaking, and she knew the down-stairs servants were early risers. She must wait till night again to return them, and to explore further; she had as yet tried but one key—there were still four more locks to be opened. Recent pain and disappointment had for the moment deadened her to any further feeling; she threw herself, dressed as she was, on the bed, and fell into the deep and dreamless sleep of utter exhaustion.

Hanna slept late, but her mistress, who was usually an early riser, did not chide her; and Hanna observed at once that something unusual had occurred, for Mrs. Dangerfield neither spoke to her, or took any notice of the especial pains which her maid was bestowing on her toilet. Mr. Dangerfield was not present; and Hanna told herself, with a bitter sneer, that no doubt, the lady’s indifference was caused by the absence of the admiring husband. However, when Helen Dangerfield entered, the maid soon gathered from the remarks of the two ladies to each other that Edgar had been suddenly and imperatively called away by telegraph. As well as she could guess from what little she heard, Hanna conjectured that the business on which Edgar had gone was

a mere matter of money; and not of so much importance to any one as to herself.

“If he has not taken it with him,” thought Hanna, “I will surely discover it before he returns—oh, if he will but stay away a week!”

That day was a trial to Hanna Dexter. She longed so for the night that every hour seemed a day; but the time came at length when she could venture forth upon her errand. It was past twelve o'clock, but not a moonlight night, for the day had been cloudy, and the evening had closed in with every indication of a storm.

But the storm had not yet broken, beyond a faint sprinkling of rain, the patter of which against the windows aided Hanna, for she could descend the stairs quickly and with less fear of being heard under cover of the slight noise made by the falling rain. She returned the envelopes, whose contents she had examined, to their former places; and she found that one of the duplicate keys in her possession opened the drawers of a secretary book-case in the library. She examined every drawer, and every most secret nook and crevice it contained; but only with her former success. She found nothing to reward her search. Heart-sick with disappointment, but still doggedly determined, she returned to her own room.

“Adelaide,” said Helen, laughingly, next day, “do you know I think my great-grandmother must have been offended at the sacrilege of putting Mr. McGrath to sleep in her room.”

“Whatever do you mean, dear?”

“Well, I don't know that I mean anything; but if I do it is this—I half suspect that antique dame has taken it into her ghostly head to walk. I thought, the night before last, that I heard footsteps on the stairs; and I vow that last night I heard the stairs creak at an unearthly hour, and when I stepped out on the landing the faint outline of a figure was visible at the farthest end of the hall, gliding right toward the haunted room.”

“Nonsense, you foolish girl!” exclaimed Mrs. Dangerfield. “At the same time, it's quite exciting, Helen—I

don't know that I object to a ghost. Let her walk, if she wants to, but what is she supposed to wish for?"

"Oh, that I can't say—but if she comes again, no doubt she will signify her desires."

Hanna Dexter, who sat sewing at a little distance, but quite within ear shot of all that was said, felt her hands tremble, and pricked her fingers with the shaking needle. She listened intently to all that was said, mentally resolving to be more careful than ever in the continuance of her search.

"Before Edgar returns," she thought, "that precious paper must be in my hands."

CHAPTER XVI.

MYSTERIOUS.

HANNA determined not to continue her search on that night. The delay caused her much inward struggling, and was a great effort of self-denial when accomplished; but she had a strong presentiment that any unusual sound or gleam of light would be quickly noticed that night, as perhaps the two ladies might be on the watch to learn whether the ghost walked. The delay was therefore absolutely necessary, and she bore it as well as she could; and she was rewarded for her patience. The first word Adelaide spoke to Helen when she entered her dressing-room on the way to breakfast showed Hanna her own wisdom in having remained in her apartment during all the previous night.

"Nelly, dear, I am so sleepy. I am going for a canter after breakfast to see if it will brighten me. Your ghostly suggestions kept me awake more than half the night. Heigh-ho! I wish Edgar was home, but there will be a letter from him to-day, I think."

That night every one in Dangerfield, as if by common consent, went to bed earlier than usual; and by midnight the whole household, except Hanna Dexter, were wrapped in slumber. But she was, as usual, engaged in what she began to fear was a hopeless search. So far she had found the locks for three keys, and she had examined the entire contents of two desks, and the secretary book-case, but without finding even a clue to that for which she sought.

Two keys still remained—a large one and a very little one. Something told her as plainly as if the words had been whispered in her ear that the small key unlocked the place in which was kept concealed the paper she so diligently searched for. But she couldn't find the lock to which the small key belonged; she could not even fit the last remaining large key to the lock it was made for. In vain, on this occasion, did she wander from room to room, all over the house, trying the key to everything that possessed a lock, but utterly without success. She was obliged to return to her own room, much downcast—more so than she had yet been, for this time she had made no progress at all.

Helen Dangerfield, who was a very quick and observant girl, had for some days noted a certain marked change in Mrs. Dangerfield's maid. Helen knew of Edgar's aversion to Hanna Dexter, and as the girl had from the first impressed her disagreeably, Helen sympathized with her brother. She knew that he had asked Adelaide to dismiss her maid, and get another, and she thought he had requested but a small favor, and she resented Adelaide's denial of it. She would have discharged every servant in Dangerfield if Edgar had desired it. But she knew her own sex too well to go the open and undisguised way to accomplish her ends. She merely kept a very sharp eye on Hanna Dexter, convinced that soon or late she would give a justifiable cause for dismissing her on the spot—or at least, for proving to Adelaide that it was her duty to do so.

She was familiar with the girl's dark pallor, and the strange, stony glare of her long, almond-shaped eyes; therefore when she saw that meaningless glare suddenly exchanged for a brilliant lighting up of the eyes that gave expression to the whole face, and often detected a hectic flush of excitement on the colorless cheek, Helen Dangerfield naturally asked herself what was the cause, and kept a keen eye of observation on her sister's maid. Hanna was unconscious of this change in her own appearance, for she was not given to consulting the looking-glass; and the change had come since she had gained possession of the keys. It was due to her alert attention during every hour of the day, and the way she had of taking in at a glance

every article in every room in which she chanced to be even for a moment. Hanna was eternally on the watch for locks to which she might fit her keys; but Helen read her wrongly.

“The woman is a thief,” thought Miss Dangerfield. “Edgar was quite right in suspecting her; but I will watch till I have a justification of his suspicions, and then Adelaide must dismiss her maid.”

Hanna was intensely occupied with her own thoughts, and the effort to discover the whereabouts of the locks to which the two remaining keys belonged, or else she might have seen that Miss Dangerfield observed her with a strange and concentrated attention several times during the day.

Hanna sat working on some fine embroidery belonging to her mistress. Her fingers were unusually active; and although her attention was completely fixed on something entirely apart, she was diligently attending to the immediate business in hand. Suddenly she uttered a sharp exclamation, and both Adelaide and Helen turned toward her.

“I beg pardon, ma’am,” the girl said, “I pricked my finger with the needle, that was all.”

Inwardly she was saying to herself: “Fool—fool! To have wasted my time so. It is in his dressing-room, of course—where else would he have kept his most private papers?”

For Hanna had remembered suddenly, but with startling distinctness, having seen in Edgar’s dressing-room an upright desk or secretary of French walnut.

At the time she had seen it she was searching for Edgar’s keys and had not yet found them: so her gaze merely wandered over the locked desk, and passed on in her search for the keys to drawers and closets which had been left unlocked.

But now, she remembered, it had struck her even then, that the desk in his dressing-room contained the paper she was in search of; and she hated and almost cursed herself for not having remembered it. However, as she reflected, she found that there was less to blame herself with than had at first appeared.

While Edgar had been at home it was simply impossible

to enter his dressing-room without his knowledge; and even now Mrs. Dangerfield's presence made it equally impossible, for it was necessary to pass through her sleeping-apartment to reach the door of Edgar's dressing-room, which was close-locked, perhaps. But that much Hanna could discover without exciting suspicion; and in the course of the day she managed to turn the handle, and push the door. It was not locked, she drew it gently to again, and gave up her whole heart and mind to thinking out a way by which she could enter it unseen, and examine the contents of the desk. The day slowly glided on; the air grew heavy and sultry, and there were tokens of a coming thunderstorm. Dinner time came and went, and all the time Hanna was saying to herself: "To-night—to-night—it must be done to-night, for Edgar may return to-morrow." But fate seemed against her; for Mrs. Dangerfield, who had never yet absented herself from the table, sent an excuse for not appearing at dinner, and complaining of a violent headache, remained in her own room. Hanna remained with her, bathing her head and temples with cologne, and brushing her long silken hair for more than an hour at a time.

There was a strange expression on the girl's face as she continued her task; and more than once it seemed, to judge by her gleaming eyes, as if she were more disposed to wind her hand in the nut-brown tresses, and dash their owner's head against the floor, than contribute by her efforts to relieve her of the pain she was suffering. But she controlled her feeling admirably, and with unflagging patience continued alternately to brush with gentlest hand the silken hair, or else bathe the snowy temples with weak cologne.

At last Mrs. Dangerfield said:

"I think that will do, Hanna—I feel better; and you must be tired. If I could have some strong tea perhaps it would do me good."

"I will get it for you, ma'am," said the maid, with alacrity.

"Do so—it is seldom I have these headaches, but when I do, they are severe. It must be the coming thunderstorm. The air is very sultry."

Hanna departed on her errand, and returned soon with a

cup of very hot tea. She had passed her own room on the way, and she poured a tea-spoonful of a colorless liquid into the tea. It did not alter its appearance or taste, for Hanna was careful to ascertain this before giving the beverage to her mistress.

"That will do," she told herself. "I don't wish to kill you, Mrs. Dangerfield. I think I can do better than that. But you will sleep soundly after drinking this tea."

Mrs. Dangerfield drank the tea, and praised the flavor.

Soon afterward she complained of feeling drowsy, and dismissed her maid.

As Hanna left the room, she slipped the key out of the lock and carried it with her.

"Perhaps she locks her door," thought the girl, "but if the key is not in it she will be too sleepy to take any trouble about it."

She dropped it in a dark corner of the hall, and ran on to her own room.

Evening deepened into night, the air grew more sultry, great drops of rain as large as a silver half dollar fell from time to time, and in the far distance could be heard the rumble of thunder. But still the storm hung fire, and at last it seemed as if it would roll and rumble itself away, and come to nothing.

The inmates of Dangerfield Mansion got tired waiting for it, and everyone went to bed, and were soon fast asleep.

Hanna felt sure that Mrs. Dangerfield must have been asleep long ago, and she was already anxious lest the first early and soundest sleep should have been slept out; so she glided with even more than her customary care across the carpeted floor, opened the door of Edgar's dressing-room, and in another instant was fitting the largest of her two remaining keys to the lock of the writing-desk. The key turned in the lock, and the desk was open. At the same moment the muffled thunder suddenly came miles nearer, a flame of lightning for a single moment seemed to light up the whole room to the most distant corner, and a roar of thunder burst over the house, shaking it to the foundation, then rolling and rumbling away. It was so sudden that Hanna could not be certain that she had not cried out or

spoken in the first startled moment; but the swift flash had shown her in the interior of the desk a very small box, its cover inlaid with mother-of-pearl that glittered in the lightning flash. She knew it was the thing she had been seeking, and in another moment the tiny key was fitted to the lock, it turned, and the box was open. At that very instant there was the rush of footsteps in the hall outside, Mrs. Dangerfield's room door was open, and some one entered hurriedly. Instinctively Hanna relocked the box, closed the desk, turned the key in it, and hid her bunch of keys in her bosom. The room was again in pitch darkness, and she shrank against the wall, close to the open door.

“Adelaide—Adelaide! Are you asleep, dear, in this awful storm?”

It was the voice of the new comer in the outer room; and Hanna recognized it at once as Miss Dangerfield's voice.

“Oh, do wake!” continued Helen, “how can you sleep through this fearful thunder, and the sky is one blaze of lightning!”

Even as she spoke the whole room was lighted up with the glare, and a roar like the sound of cannon sounded over and around the house, while the windows and shutters clattered. Hanna saw by the lightning flash that Miss Dangerfield stood over the bed, and that the way to the door was clear.

It was now dark again, and Hanna made a rush for the outer door, but she overturned a chair, and caught her dress as she did so—at the same moment Mrs. Dangerfield, awakened by the thunder, but bewildered by the sleeping draught she had taken, was conscious only of the lesser sound, and started up screaming.

“What was that? Helen, is it you—what is the matter?”

Hanna fled madly into the hall, not an instant too soon, for again the room was alight with the glare of lightning, and the terrific noise of the succeeding thunder covered the commotion of her escape. But Helen cried out:

“Some one was in the room—there is a thief in the house! Come with me! I was frightened by the storm, for light-

ning makes a coward of me, but I *will* know what this means?"

Mrs. Dangerfield threw on a wrapper and followed her spirited sister-in-law; but the landing was pitch dark and Mrs. Dangerfield returned for a light, crying out:

"Don't go alone, Helen—ring the bell—alarm the house!"

"No, I know the thief—she is only a woman. We need no assistance."

Again the lightning blazed out, and Helen saw at the farthest extremity of a corridor, which ran in a semicircle, a white-robed figure flying wildly on, and evidently trying to escape. Mrs. Dangerfield returned with a light.

"I see her!" cried Helen. "Adelaide, go that way—I will go this! There is no escape. She cannot get out of this corridor—these are the only entrances. There is neither door nor hall in its entire length."

The two ladies, excited by the chase, hurried on, and presently came around the corridor where they could see each other, and midway between them a white figure, standing still and desperate, with bowed head and drooped arms. As they neared her she turned her face as if she would hide against the wall, raised her arms, with a sharp cry, and flung them and herself forward as if she would cleave a passage for her own escape. Mrs. Dangerfield and Helen rushed forward, each stretched out a hand to grasp the fugitive, and their hands clasped each other, with only the blank wall before them.

"Where is she?" they each stammered with broken accents: and then they felt the wall, smooth and unbroken, and drew back and stared at each other.

"What does it mean?" they gasped, and a cold chill passed from one to the other, and the lightning blazed, and showed them only each other's white, startled faces.

CHAPTER XVII.

A PRECIOUS PAPER.

HELEN was the first to recover her voice and her scattered wits.

"This is very strange," she said; "but I am no believer in the supernatural, notwithstanding my jests about our

ghost. There must be some natural explanation of what seems so extraordinary to us, and I am determined to find out the key to it."

"What possible explanation can there be?" asked Mrs. Dangerfield, and the lightning, which at that moment lit up the whole corridor, showed her face to be strangely white and awe-struck. "We could not both have been mistaken in fancying that we saw a woman; and if there was really a woman, she has really vanished through the wall before our very eyes."

"No; that is where we were mistaken; you dropped the candle, and for some moments we were absolutely in darkness; when the lightning flashed again and we thought we saw her in this spot, our eyes were doubtless bewildered, and she escaped us by gliding along the wall, and so getting to the farthest end of the corridor before we had recovered from our amazement."

"She? Who? Nell, my dear, you speak as if you knew who the woman was."

"And so I do; the woman is a thief who was endeavoring to rob you while you slept, and the thief is your waiting-maid, Hanna Dexter!"

"Preposterous! Why, Helen, you are worse than Edgar. But come, it is easy to prove your suspicions wrong and cruel; if the woman was Hanna, there is only one way to her room from this corridor, and as the communicating door is nearly always locked, it will be easy enough to discover whether she went that way."

Mrs. Dangerfield went forward as she spoke, and as the storm continued to rage with increasing fury, the thunder rolling in deafening peals over the house, and the lightning succeeding in sheets of flame to every reverberating roar, their way was sufficiently lighted and they did not wait to procure another candle.

In a few minutes they reached the door, which was the only entrance into a hall leading from that part of the house to the western wing. The door was locked, and the key was in the lock on the side next to them. This puzzled even Helen, causing her to doubt whether it could have been Hanna, and making Mrs. Dangerfield exclaim:

“There, you see you were mistaken—it could not have been Hanna.”

“It is true that she could not have passed this way, leaving the door locked as it is; but it is no proof that it was not she whom we saw. She has evaded us, and is waiting in some corner now for an opportunity to reach her own room.”

“How persistent you are!” exclaimed Adelaide, “and I never could have believed you were so suspicious. But come on to Hanna’s room—if we find her there you must confess yourself mistaken.”

She unlocked the door as she spoke, and they proceeded toward Hanna Dexter’s room. The hall was dark and they had, tremblingly, to feel their way along; Adelaide suggested that they should return to her room for a light; but Helen objected with the unanswerable reason that the waiting-maid would seize that opportunity to gain her room in safety, thus leaving them without any clue to the mystery which had so perplexed them. Mrs. Dangerfield was provoked by her persistence; and setting her white teeth together resolutely braced herself to the effort of clearing her maid from suspicion.

They reached Hanna’s door, and had to knock more than once before they received any sign that they were heard. Helen said nothing, but Adelaide felt sure of the triumph she was experiencing, and was provoked. She knocked long and loud on the girl’s door, and was presently rewarded by hearing sounds within. The door opened, and Hanna Dexter, partly unrobed, and with a night-dress thrown hastily over her, appeared, holding a small bedroom candlestick in her hand. She was very pale, paler than usual, but the expression of her face was calm.

“Well—well, bring your candle out and light us back to Mrs. Dangerfield’s room,” Helen returned, impatiently; “we have been much alarmed by an apparent attempt to rob my sister while she slept.”

Hanna merely requested permission to change her night-dress for a wrapper, and then, candle in hand, preceded the two ladies toward Mrs. Dangerfield’s room. She took the ordinary passage-way, leading from her own room to the main part of the house; and Adelaide marked the circum-

stance by a single glance at Helen, but the latter took no notice. She was still unconvinced, and determined to sift the mystery which had baffled her. But she saw that it was quite hopeless to accuse Hanna further, until she had positive proof to offer. Mrs. Dangerfield had taken a positive liking to the girl; at first because she so exactly suited her, and then she felt that she was a sort of protegee of her own since the unjust prejudices of Edgar and Helen.

The storm continued to increase in violence; the house shook beneath the fury of the tempest; and long before they had reached her room, Mrs. Dangerfield was trembling violently in the reaction from the excitement and the fright she had received from the mysterious, ghost-like disappearance of the figure in the corridor. But most of all her excitement was due, though she knew nothing of it, to the effect of the opiate she had drunk in her tea. It was the first time in her life that she had ever taken an opiate; and as her sleep had been broken before the effect had passed away, the result was a wild and incomprehensible excitement, which culminated in a severe fit of hysterics, as soon as she had regained her room.

Helen Dangerfield, who had never seen any one in hysterics, was terrified; and Adelaide, who had no experience of the reaction from intense nervous excitement, was frightened beyond all effort at self-control, and thought herself going mad. Her piercing screams soon roused the whole house, and the room was speedily filled with servants, who managed to make the confusion worse by becoming as frightened as the rest; and it was only when Colonel Dangerfield arrived upon the scene that the case was properly understood, and the correct manner of treating it acted upon.

In the meantime Hanna Dexter had resolved on a bold movement. She felt as convinced as though she had already seen it, that the paper she sought was contained in the tiny box which she had seen in the secretary in Edgar's dressing-room.

In the confusion attendant on Mrs. Dangerfield's attack of illness, which was aggravated by the storm, no one thought of anything but tending on the suffering woman.

Hanna glided into Edgar's dressing-room, went directly to the secretary, and as she always carried her bunch of keys about her, opened the desk, then fitted a key to the lock of the box she had before opened, and hastily examined its contents.

At first her heart sank at finding nothing but what seemed to be trinkets and keepsakes; but presently her quick fingers detected a false bottom, and beneath that she found a folded paper. Determined to possess herself of it at any hazard, she took it, relocked and closed the box, and returned it to the secretary, and then locked that, too.

The room was dark, and she could not see to read the paper, but her heart told her that she had at last accomplished her purpose. She placed the paper in her bosom, and returned to Mrs. Dangerfield's room, her absence not having been detected, even by Helen, who was too much alarmed and preoccupied by Adelaide's condition to think of anything else.

It was quite an hour, and the fury of the storm had spent itself, before Mrs. Dangerfield had grown calm enough to exercise her customary self-control; but when she did, she immediately sent the servants to bed, thanked and kissed her uncle, begging he would forgive her for frightening them all, and was left alone with the waiting-maid.

Hanna made herself useful in many ways, waited most patiently on her mistress, flew to obey Helen's behests, and all the time felt the precious paper against her beating heart.

At last Mrs. Dangerfield declared herself better, and expressed a disposition to sleep; so Hanna was again dismissed for the night, and Helen Dangerfield remained with her sister.

Hanna Dexter took up her candle and returned to her room. She scarcely felt the floor beneath her feet, as she sped along with flying footsteps. She locked her door and drew forth the paper she had purloined, her heart alternately wild with hope and sinking with apprehension; but the first glance at it caused her to fall on her knees with a cry of joy, and again and again she murmured:

"Oh, God, I thank thee—I thank thee!"

Across the paper was written: "Certificate of Marriage, between Elise Morel, of Montreal, Dominion of Canada, and Edgar Dangerfield, of Dangerfield, State of New York, United States."

It was the same paper which Edgar Dangerfield had shown to his friend Allan, on the night of the fire in Toronto. The waiting-maid knew it at once, but she opened it and read the few lines it contained, again and again; tenderly pressed her lips to the paper; then she refolded it and returned it to her bosom, where it lay against her heart till the hour of her death.

A great calm fell upon her, but she could not sleep; and to pass the remaining hours of the night she drew out her diary and writing materials from their hiding-place and noted down the events of the night.

JUNE 30th.—"When they discovered me and pursued me into the corridor, I felt that all was lost, and my heart seemed to die within me; one on each side, they pursued me and closed me in, and I knew that if I was recognized I might as well die at once; for it would mean expulsion from the house, which would arouse suspicion, and Edgar would destroy the proof of our marriage and declare me a mad woman. I felt then as if I would go mad. I had no hope of escape.

"I turned to the wall and flung up my arms against it in utter despair, in the hope that for a minute longer I might hide my face; but the wall seemed to move, it seemed to open beneath the pressure of my body, and as I then leaned against it with all my weight and strength, I felt myself revolve, I heard a sharp click, and found myself in utter darkness.

"It all took place within so few seconds that I did not know I had escaped till I heard my pursuers' voices on the other side, and almost felt their hands against the wall, as they sought for some opening by which I might have disappeared. There was not a moment to lose, and I was too much excited for fear, although my deliverance seemed nothing less than a miracle to me. I had my dark lantern, and I soon lighted it from a match which I struck on the sole of my shoe. Then I saw what had happened. I was

in a narrow passage-way, which led to a flight of steps at a little distance; and I had accidentally struck on the spring which moved a part of the wall, that had slid back into its place, on the instant that my weight was removed from it.

“I understood what had seemed so marvelous, now; although I had only read of such things, and never had quite believed them. I had often heard Edgar say that the house was very old, and had been built in revolutionary times; the place in which I now found myself was no doubt a secret passage, to be used on occasion of danger, and when escape was otherwise impossible. I hurried on and ran down the steps; they led to a place about the size of a small room, and which, of course, was pitch-dark, except the ray of light from my lantern. I ran against a great hogshead, and my hand was covered with something that I found, on looking at it, was gunpowder—the hogshead was full of it. Good Heavens! What a thing to have concealed, as it was, in the very middle of the house. I drew back, frightened, and screened the very light of my lamp from the dangerous thing—at the same time a wild and horrible thought came to me: If I never find my marriage certificate, I can at least blow the whole Dangerfield mansion and every one in it to atoms. But at that moment my first care was to escape from the place. I looked around and saw that another flight of stairs led to another descent, and having no choice, hurried down them, feeling more and more bewildered; for I was beginning to fear that I might never find my way out. The secret passage was evidently unknown to the family, and the way out of it might never be discovered, except by one possessing the secret! At the foot of the second flight of stairs I found three small passage-ways, leading three different directions: and with blind faith I took the first. It brought me to a spiral stairway, ascending which, I climbed as rapidly as possible, but in my haste it seemed as if I would never reach the top of it. But when I arrived there at last I judged from the noise of the storm, which I could now hear in all its fury, that I must be near some habitable part of the house. I looked about and saw the rough side of a wall before me,

and directly in front of me a small iron knob. I thought this must be the spring to some contrivance for entering some one of the rooms, and at the risk of being discovered, for I was now half wild with fear, I seized, and tried to turn it. A portion of the wall moved, precisely as it had done in the corridor, and in another moment I was in my own room, and the wall had closed behind me, leaving not even a crack, that I could see, for the interior wall was curiously painted in figures that fitted into each other.

“Before I could utter even a silent thanksgiving for this great and unexpected relief, I heard the sound of knocking at my door, and as soon as I could prepare myself for opening it, I found his sister—Mrs. Dangerfield—ha—ha! madame, you will bear that title but a short while, now I found them both in search of me, as I had, indeed, expected. I hate Helen Dangerfield. She suspects me for other than I seem, and has done so from the first, almost—she hates me, and I hate her. Not even her resemblance to Edgar melts my heart toward her. As for the other, if she had never come with that glorious face of hers, between me and mine, I could have loved her, for she is a queenly woman, and beautiful—ah me! how beautiful! Can I ever make him forget that radiant face, now when I am scarred and hideous—that face that so far eclipsed mine even when he called me beautiful? I know not of what stuff I am made. I thought I hated him—yes, hated him, even though I loved him, and my bruised heart called out only for revenge. But now, when the means of vengeance is in my hand, the heart I thought dead rises up and pleads for him—my husband—my husband! Oh, how I love you, for I could forgive, yes, and forget everything if you would but once more hold me in your arms and say, as you used to do, ‘Darling, I love you!’ Alas—alas! I know you will never do that, but I will do nothing rashly, now. You are my husband, and I can prove it to the whole world—you must acknowledge me and call me wife; but it shall be done in your own way, dearest—if you will only consent to do it. I will not humiliate you more than is unavoidable—I will be generous, Edgar, if you will be just. Only be kind to me—love me a little, a very little, I won’t ask for much. But

mine you are, and no other woman shall bear your name while I live."

Hanna Dexter closed her journal and locked it away. Her heart was full, and her mind was distracted with many thoughts; but in the midst of all she was conscious of a calm and tranquil triumph in the possession of the paper she had almost periled her life to obtain.

It wanted some hours of morning, and she spent the time in applying a wash to her eyebrows and to her blonde hair. When she had done so a great many times, both her eyebrows and hair were turned from a light straw color to a very dark brown, and the waiting-maid's appearance was marvelously changed and improved.

CHAPTER XVIII.

EDGAR'S RETURN.

ON the next morning, Mrs. Dangerfield was still weak and tremulous; and Colonel Dangerfield insisted on calling in the family physician, who prescribed a tonic, and perfect quiet for a few days. Edgar was hourly expected home now, or Helen would have telegraphed to hasten his return, so much alarmed did she feel by Adelaide's illness, and by another circumstance, which may be at once mentioned.

When Mrs. Dangerfield's maid entered her room the morning after the storm, the lady was so much astonished at the change in the girl's appearance that she could not disguise her surprise, and Miss Dangerfield, who was present, regarded Hanna with renewed and increased suspicion and aversion.

It was not merely the change which the different coloring of the hair and eyebrows produced in the young woman's face; her whole expression and bearing were altered.

She looked bright and animated, the triumph of the night before had kindled a brilliant color in her cheeks and lips, and although it was only the color of excitement, it was none the less becoming; she carried herself proudly, her step was quick and elastic; and though no one would have called her handsome, it would have been easy for any one

to imagine that she might have been extremely pretty before her face was so marred as it now was.

"Hanna! What in the world is the matter with you?" Mrs. Dangerfield cried out, with a visible start of amazement, "or is it you, really? What have you been doing to yourself, girl?"

Helen listened eagerly for the answer, but did not remove her gaze from the waiting-maid. Hanna answered with a slight smile—the first her mistress had ever seen upon her face:

"Does it make so very much difference, madam? But this is the natural color of my hair; indeed, it is naturally quite black; when I was in New York, I had it bleached, just for a whim, but I have grown tired of it. I prefer the original color."

Mrs. Dangerfield frowned slightly, and by a quick glance conveyed to Helen that she began to think there was something very queer about the waiting-maid. Helen wisely said nothing, foreseeing that her sister would, in time, come around to her own and Edgar's views in regard to Hanna Dexter.

"It certainly does change you, greatly," Mrs. Dangerfield said, "and it makes your face strangely familiar to me. Can I ever have seen you anywhere before you came to Dangerfield?"

"No, madam, I should think that was quite impossible."

Hanna's voice was changed as much as her general appearance. Instead of being harsh and cold, it was soft and rich, and though somewhat provincial in accent, refined in tone.

She took up Mrs. Dangerfield's brushes and dressing-comb, and proceeded to dress that lady's hair, but with a manner of marked carelessness, as contrasted with her previous mode of performing that operation.

Mrs. Dangerfield was extremely sensitive to every shade in the manners of those about her, and she felt the change in her waiting-maid's manner instantly.

Her cheek flushed and she raised her head with a haughty gesture when she became conscious of the intentional disrespect in Hanna's performance of her duties. The fact

that Helen was present and observed it too, added a sting to her annoyance.

"Hanna," she said, abruptly, "you do not satisfy me as you did at first; and I may as well give you warning now. You will not suit me as a maid, and you may consider yourself free at the end of the month."

The girl laughed carelessly; she then answered:

"I was just going to tell you, madame, that the situation doesn't suit me, and I would be pleased to leave your service as soon as convenient."

"Whenever you please," said the lady, as with a proud, cold gesture, she waved her maid away from her. "And for the present you may leave the room."

"You were right, Nelly, dear," she continued, turning to Helen, when the door closed after Hanna. "Both you and Edgar were right—there certainly is something queer about that young woman. I wouldn't be surprised if she turned out to be crazy."

"I am glad, dear, that you have dismissed her, anyway, and Edgar will be glad, too—dear fellow! how I wish he would come home. The house isn't the same without him."

Adelaide sighed, and echoed the sentiment.

"But he will be at home to-night," she added. "I expect a telegram at any minute."

"Then I do hope you will be quite recovered before he comes, for if you are not, he will be terrified, and then good-bye to our Fourth of July trip to Philadelphia."

"Nonsense! I shall be entirely well, and I wouldn't miss the Fourth of July in Philadelphia for anything in the world. That impertinent girl is re-trimming my black silk, and it must be finished before she goes, too. Oh, what a nuisance waiting-maids are! and this one suited me so well. I'll never find her equal."

Mrs. Dangerfield received the expected telegraphic despatch within the next hour, and Edgar returned early in the evening, in time for dinner.

Mrs. Dangerfield was much too well-bred and dignified to maintain any coolness of demeanor toward a servant, because she was discharged; consequently Hanna was required to attend to all her duties as usual, and when Edgar re-

turned she was seated in her customary place, sewing some very rich old lace on a black silk basque.

Adelaide heard her husband's step upon the stairs, and she flew like a girl to meet him. They had been married only a month, and surely their ardor was reasonable, it being still their honeymoon. But Hanna Dexter could not be expected to sympathize in the joy of their reunion. Her sewing dropped in a heap on her lap, and she clasped her hands tightly together, for it required the full exercise of the self-control she had so painfully learned to enable her to sit quietly by, while the man she so hopelessly adored held another woman in his close embrace, and showered kisses on her beautiful face.

Edgar presently entered with Adelaide, his arm still thrown around her waist, and his eyes too much absorbed in loving admiration of her glowing beauty to be conscious of any other presence.

Hanna resumed her sewing, and with bent head appeared to be entirely devoted to her task.

"You must dress for dinner now, dearest," Mrs. Dangerfield said, "and there isn't a minute to lose, either, for there's but scant time, and you know this is the abode of punctuality. But I will go and tell them you must have fifteen minutes' grace, being just returned from a journey. Hanna, light the candles in Mr. Dangerfield's dressing-room."

The girl obeyed, and Adelaide took the occasion of her momentary absence to lift her blushing face toward her husband, and he improved the opportunity. He was looking unusually handsome, and Adelaide thought she had never been so much in love with him. At that moment Hanna returned from the adjoining room and Adelaide withdrew a step or two from Edgar. He looked toward the unwelcome intruder with a slight frown of impatience; but the expression of his face instantly changed to a look of abject terror, he uttered a broken exclamation, then stood in silence looking at his wife's maid as though he beheld a ghostly apparition.

"Dearest Edgar," exclaimed Adelaide, "you look positively frightened! But it is only Hanna. No wonder you

should be surprised, though—I could scarcely believe my eyes. You must know she has been masquerading, and sailing under false colors. It seems she took a whim—quite a fashionable whim—to be a blonde; so she had her hair bleached and colored her brows; but she got tired of it, she says, and really, the change is wonderful. But now you *must* go and dress, darling, and I will go and arrange the delay about serving dinner.”

Edgar made a supreme effort after calmness and composure; and kissing his wife’s hand, as she left the room, entered his dressing-room, and locked the door.

“I have had a scare about nothing,” he thought; “it is that infernal resemblance. I scarcely saw it before, but the change in the hair brings it out. Why do I tremble and turn cold as if I had seen one raised from the dead?—and an awful suspicion has got hold of me—but it is impossible—impossible!”

He approached the secretary, unlocked it, opened the small box inlaid with mother-of-pearl, and turning out the trinkets as if they had been rubbish, raised the false bottom, and looked beneath it. There was nothing there; and with a groan, he sank into the nearest chair, while the box fell from his nerveless grasp, and was shattered to pieces on the floor.

“It is Elise,” he said, despairingly, “Elise—alive—and well—and here! Oh, God, my sin has surely found me out. She was not killed—she is not dead, but here—here, and in her possession the proof that she is my wife? I am ruined! Adelaide will scorn me—will hate me—and I shall lose her forever. What shall I do—what can I do? I will die rather than lose her—rather than live to see those sweet eyes that I adore turned from me in loathing and contempt!”

CHAPTER XIX.

THE CURSE FULFILLED.

THE next day was Sunday; and Edgar had driven Adelaide to church, as usual; but he had been unaccountably silent, and despite his efforts to conceal it, very visibly depressed in spirits. In vain Adelaide rallied him, and sought to raise him out of what seemed moodiness, to her;

he would endeavor to respond to her light gayety for a few minutes at a time, but would presently settle down into his previous listless melancholy. Adelaide had not found him in this mood when she met him, and threw herself into his arms on his return; on the contrary, he had been full of enthusiastic admiration and ardent affection, as usual; but when she returned to him, after giving orders to delay the dinner, she had found him changed. The change was so sudden and so marked that she could not fail to perceive it, and naturally she sought for an explanation. And as she questioned herself and ransacked her memory she could not fail to note that this change had come on Edgar since he had observed the difference in Hanna Dexter's appearance.

"It is absurd that a servant, who is, at the worst, perhaps a little crack-brained, should produce such an effect on my husband," thought Adelaide; "but since he has taken such an incurable dislike to the girl, I am very glad she has given me an opportunity to dismiss her."

"Edgar, dear," said the lady, as they drove home from church, "you'll be glad to hear that I have discharged Hanna—you know you wished it so much."

"Discharged Hanna!" exclaimed Edgar. "What on earth are you thinking of—you mustn't do any such thing!"

"Edgar, are you going crazy—or what is the matter with you? Why, you have again and again entreated me, as a special favor, to dismiss the woman——"

"Yes, but you wouldn't dismiss her when I asked you, and now it's too late."

"Too late for what? What has she done?" exclaimed Adelaide, incredulously.

"Done—nothing. I beg your pardon, darling, I wasn't quite attending to what you were saying—of course you have done right, whatever it is. So you have discharged your waiting-maid, have you, dear? And how did she take her dismissal?"

"Oh, very coolly, indeed, I assure you. She gave me to understand that if I had not dismissed her, she would have dismissed me very soon, as the situation does not suit her.

I don't think I was ever quite so much mistaken in any one as in Hanna Dexter."

"Impertinent creature!" muttered Edgar, and his heart sunk into its lowest depths, for he was now convinced that Hanna was indeed the deserted Elise, and he felt how entirely he was in her power. "When does she go?" he asked, aloud.

"On the fourth; I shall pay her up to the end of the month, of course, but I wouldn't leave her in the house an hour after we have gone. I begin to think her insane, she looks and acts so strangely."

"I told you so from the first, my darling," said Edgar, with animation, for Adelaide's random remark had given him hope and a sudden inspiration by which he might once more gain his freedom.

He would continue to declare his belief in Hanna Dexter's insanity, and in the meantime he would work upon the girl's feelings, throw himself on her mercy, obtain the certificate of his marriage with her, and having destroyed it, throw her upon the world as a raving lunatic.

His spirits arose with the idea, for he was desperate at the thought of losing Adelaide, and he would not have hesitated at murder to obtain freedom from his hated wife, could he but feel safe in putting her out of the way.

He sought an opportunity of gaining an interview with the waiting-maid, but she spent the greater part of the day in her room, for Adelaide did not make many calls upon her that day, and on the next day, Monday, Hanna was absorbed in the work which her mistress had given her to do; and if she perceived Edgar's anxiety to have speech with her she gave no sign of it, but with eyes steadfastly bent on her sewing, stitched away as if her life depended on it.

"What does she intend to do?" Edgar asked himself, "Does she intend to leave the house without a word to me, now that she has achieved her purpose and has me entirely in her power? Perhaps she will go direct to McGrath, place the marriage certificate in his hands, and give me up to the mercies of his tender profession. As if I wouldn't rather die than acknowledge that creature as my wife, now. No—no, Adelaide, my darling, I cannot lose you; if I cannot get

free from that dreadful creature, I will take you away with me where oceans and continents shall separate us from her, till she has worn herself out and dies in a madhouse—where she ought to be, now.”

The day and evening wore away, and Hanna Dexter had retired to her room for the night, and yet Edgar had found no opportunity to speak with her.

Early on the next day the whole house was astir, for the family were going by an early train to Philadelphia; the servants had all obtained permission to spend the day abroad as they might please, and Hanna was to take her departure. The carriage containing Colonel Dangerfield, Helen, and Adelaide stood waiting for Edgar, who was passing through the hall toward the door when the waiting-maid stepped out from the library and stood before him.

“You here?” cried Edgar, for she was supposed to have left the house a half hour previously.

“Yes; you thought I was gone, did you? I know the others thought they were rid forever of crazy Hanna Dexter, but I think you might have known better, Edgar.”

She stood before him, thin, pale, dressed in clinging, close-fitting garments of dead black; her veil was thrown back and her face was raised defiantly to his—that face once so pretty, now scarred and disfigured; and although Edgar had up to that moment hoped against hope that he was mistaken, he knew now past all doubt that it was his wife who spoke to him.

He was as pale as herself, and trembling so that he could with difficulty speak.

“Elise!” he said, with ashen, tremulous lips.

“Yes, Elise, your wife,” returned the girl, sternly.

“I thought you were dead,” he said, in a low, stricken voice. “You loved me once, Elise, have pity on me.”

Her eyes softened, and looked at him tenderly, through a mist of tears.

“Be just to me, then,” she murmured, “and I will pity you.”

“What must I do?” he asked, in the gentle, tender voice that used to melt her girlish, loving heart: and it was not

powerless now, particularly when he continued humbly: "You know that I must do whatever you say."

"Then you must stay here, with me: I am your wife, and this is my home."

"That is impossible, now, Elise. They are waiting for me to drive them to the station, and there is no time to spare, either."

"Colonel Dangerfield can drive them."

"My father never drives; and besides, they are waiting for me, my sister and my—"

"And Miss Urquhart," Elise interrupted. "Yes, I know; but Colonel Dangerfield must consent to drive them this time."

"Miss Urquhart," repeated Edgar, and the flush of anger arose to his cheek and brow.

"Miss Adelaide Urquhart," returned Elise, quietly, while she looked steadily in his face. "Your cousin, Edgar."

Edgar Dangerfield bit his lips with rage, and felt that he would like to kill her; but he felt himself hopelessly in her power, and dared not say a word. There was a quiet determination in her manner that mastered him. Till he regained possession of the marriage certificate and destroyed it, or forever placed Adelaide beyond her reach, he knew that he dared not cross the wishes of the woman now regarding him with cold and determined gaze.

"As you say, they are waiting for you, Edgar, and there is no time to lose," continued Elise. "Shall I tell them to drive on without you, lest they miss the train?"

"No, I will tell them!" and with a sudden determination, Edgar hurried from the house out to the carriage.

"Father," he said, "you will be kind enough to drive the girls over, and take care of them till I come on. I will follow on the next train. I have, till this moment, neglected something that must be attended to, and I cannot go on this train."

"But, Edgar, you must!" declared Adelaide, not accustomed to be disappointed. "Do you suppose I care to go without you? I will wait, too!"

"That's impossible," returned Edgar, curtly. "I don't wish it; and I tell you I will follow in the next train."

"Oh, very well!" exclaimed Adelaide, flushing with anger and mortification; and she turned away much offended.

Edgar caught her hand, and passionately pressed it to his lips.

"You must not be angry with me, my own," he whispered. "I will explain fully when we meet—indeed, I cannot now, and there isn't time."

Adelaide made no answer. She said to Colonel Dangerfield:

"Drive on, uncle, please—since we are ordered to go."

Edgar stood looking after them till they were out of sight, and never since he had ceased to love Elise did he hate her with such bitter and unrelenting hatred as he felt for her at that moment.

He was in no hurry to return to the house, where Elise awaited him, standing a little back from the window in the shadow of the heavy curtains.

He walked around it, and about the grounds, with no thought of escaping her; for he knew the interview was inevitable. But he wished to shape his ideas into form, and fix on some plan for bringing the interview to a conclusion favorable for himself.

What he most wished was to learn whether she still had the certificate, or whether she had already sent it to McGrath.

As he wandered around the house he sent off, with angry threats, many boys from the village who were exploding fire-crackers in close proximity to the building—as, indeed, they had been doing from an early hour of the morning; but in the anxiety and preoccupation of his mind he failed to notice that a bundle of sticks and rubbish close to the house were already smoking and smouldering, ready at any moment to burst into a blaze.

With a deep and troubled sigh—for his grief was none the less deep that he had brought it upon himself—he entered the house at last, and found Elise patiently waiting for him.

He had in his mind the rough idea of a certain plan he had decided to act upon; but his repugnance to the woman whom he was forced to remember was his wife, made it very difficult to carry it out with any prospect of success.

“Elise,” he said, sitting down beside her, and taking her hand in his, “is your heart very hard toward me? Try, for a moment, to put yourself in my place, and remember that all I have done, which must seem so heartless to you, was done under the impression that you were dead.”

“And you were not sorry to believe that I was dead, Edgar?” but despite her utmost efforts she could not speak in a firm tone, for the soft clasp of his hand holding hers thrilled every pulse in her body.

“Oh, Elise, don’t be unjust and cruel!” said Edgar.

It was all that he could bring himself to say in protestation against the accusation of her words, although he recognized to the fullest extent the peril of his own position, and the necessity of saying whatever he could say to soften the bitterness of her feelings toward him. But his whole heart and mind were full of Adelaide—he could not even make an attempt at feigning love for another.

“But you did love me once, Edgar,” said Elise, to whom his words, cold as they were, seemed tender; and who thrilled at the very sound of his voice.

“You know that I loved you, Elise, you know well that I loved you; and that night when I returned and found your little home in flames, and saw the woman whom I believed to be yourself swallowed up in them, the sight nearly killed me.”

There Edgar was more successful than he had yet been; and he drew a picture, partly from memory, partly from imagination, of his despair for the supposed loss of Elise that brought tears of joy to the girl’s eyes and melted the heart within her breast. She turned and threw herself weeping on his bosom, and clasped her arms around his neck.

“You did care, Edgar, when you thought I was killed—oh! bless you, my darling, for that—I can forgive you for everything now.”

With a sudden impulse of compassion, one of those kindly

impulses which often moved him for a moment, Edgar stooped and kissed her eyes—the one feature of her face that was still lovely, and the gentle, loving expression of which at that moment might easily have made less lovely eyes look beautiful.

Elise uttered a cry of joy almost piercing in its keen delight.

“Kiss me, Edgar,” she cried, “my darling—my husband, kiss me again,” and wreathing her arms about his neck, she covered his face with a rain of kisses. It seemed to lift a weight from her heart, and gave to her countenance a radiant expression which half obliterated its disfiguring scars.

Edgar was almost touched by it, so nearly so, indeed, that it lent a momentary sincerity to his manner. He petted and soothed her; he reverted to the days of their first acquaintance and courtship; he ignored all that had passed since then. He hoped to lead Elise on to speak of herself, to win from her some allusion to the marriage certificate and to learn its whereabouts; but he found her nature changed. The childlike confidence with which she would once have told him everything was gone forever; at the first faint allusion to that paper for which she had periled everything, she froze instantly, and her face took a hard and stony look. The time was passing rapidly; already a couple of hours were gone, and Edgar had missed the next train following that on which the others had gone to Philadelphia, and yet he had gained nothing by his delay—except temporarily separating Elise and Adelaide. He began to realize that he must come down to plain, distinct questions and answers in regard to what he wished to find out.

“You have our marriage certificate, Elise?” he asked. “I kept it safe—but you have stolen it—did you think I would have refused it to you once I knew that you lived?”

“Yes, I did, Edgar—forgive me if I wronged you; but I thought I had good reason to doubt you. And as for stealing—it was not stealing to take my own; and if it had been, you set me the example.”

“Do not let us waste time in bickering,” said Edgar,

sorely perplexed, and with difficulty keeping his temper. "Say, at least, that you have it safe."

"I have it safe, and where you will never again gain possession of it," returned Elise, her short-lived confidence and joy beginning to fade before the expression of Edgar's face; and much of her former coldness and suspicion returning.

"What do you mean?" cried Edgar; "you have not sent it to McGrath, have you?"

"And what if I have?" retorted Elise. "I might well wish it in a place of safety."

"What if you have?—only this, madam, that I will never forgive you—could you not trust to my honor? Do you think I will be compelled to receive you as my wife? You fool—do you not know that no law can compel me to live with you? The world is wide, and I will go to the utmost extremity of it rather than stay where you can find me."

"You cannot take her," cried Elise, "she will not go—she is too proud a woman for that; and she will hate and loathe you when she knows all——"

"But she never shall know it—she will go as my wife—she will go to-morrow, before your mad ravings can reach her, and so I wish you joy of your maneuvering, Mrs. Dangerfield, and much pleasure may you have in that empty title, for it is all that ever you will have," and shaking her clinging hands from his arm, Edgar turned to the door and seized the handle.

Elise flung herself before him.

"No—no, Edgar!" she screamed, in piercing tones. "You shall not go—you shall not leave me for her—oh, speak to me—speak to me, darling—say you don't love her, say that you care for me, a little—only such a little, Edgar, I will do anything, I will promise anything, only say that you don't love that woman, and that you do love me!"

"I do not love you," returned Edgar, desperately, pushing her aside, and striving to open the door; but it would not yield to his hand, for Elise had locked it, and the key was now in her pocket. "I hate you, do you hear? I hate you, and I love her you would like to separate me from—I love her to mad idolatry."

Elise gave a wild cry, and pressed her hands to her ears, as if she would shut out the sound.

Edgar, finding he could not open the door, went toward the window from which it was easy to leap out into the garden, but the sight which met his eyes caused him to fall back in dismay.

The whole side of the house was on fire, and already tongues of flame were rushing in by the window. During their preoccupation and the subsequent excitement of their conversation, the fire had caught the house, and made such headway that more than half the lower part of Dangerfield mansion was in flames. Elise didn't even see it. She pursued Edgar, as he rushed again to the door, crying to him like a mad woman:

"Don't leave me, Edgar, don't leave me to go to her—I will give up the certificate—I won't say I'm your wife—I will do anything you say, only don't leave me to go to her—I have it here—I didn't send it away at all—I will give it to you, darling!"

But Edgar was too much alarmed by the new and imminent danger to which he found himself exposed to heed or even hear her wild words.

"Where is the key?" she shouted again and again.

Elise only answered with entreaties that he would not leave her.

"Then I must make a rush for it," said Edgar, once more approaching the window, which was now surrounded by flame, that scorched his face and hair when he approached it. "As for you, stay and be burned, as you ought to have been."

He leaped on to a high chair, at the risk of a scorching, for a flying spring through the flaming window into the garden beneath. But Elise flung herself before him, and clung to his knees, till with a furious imprecation, he thrust her from him, sending her half-way across the room. The impetus of the movement caused him to lose his balance, and before he could regain it there was a shock and the roar as of a hundred cannon exploded all around them; and in the next moment, Dangerfield mansion, with all it con-

tained, was blown into the air, and scattered for many hundred yards round about.

The fire had reached the cellar, burning well underneath the house at first, and a spark having fallen into the hogs-head of gunpowder concealed in the secret passage, for some long forgotten and unknown purpose, had served to work out the curse pronounced by the enemy of Dangerfield a century ago.

CHAPTER XX.

“SO MUCH FOR DREAMS.”

ADELAIDE had little enjoyment in her Fourth of July trip to Philadelphia. Hour after hour passed, and still Edgar did not come; they took an open carriage and drove about the city, but the heat was almost beyond endurance, and the crowd was immense, so they soon gave that up, and returned to their hotel. As the day wore away both Helen and her father shared Adelaide's disturbance at Edgar's non-appearance; but none of them were positively alarmed, for it seemed absurd to suppose that any accident could have happened to him. Adelaide was alternately indignant and distressed because Edgar did not come; the subject was not one minute out of her thoughts all day, and her mind being full of that and of his strange manner for the past few days, her thoughts naturally mixed themselves up with the effect produced in him by the change in her waiting-maid's appearance. The girl's face haunted her, and the sound of her voice kept ringing in her ears; she could not rid herself of the idea that Edgar's moodiness was in some way connected with Hanna Dexter's presence in the house. What was it?—what could it mean?—and where had she seen that young woman and heard her voice before?—she was so tormented with the half remembrance which she could not make clear to herself, that she was nearly wild because of it.

“It is too bad,” said Helen, late that night, while the two ladies sat together at an upper window, watching the illuminations and fireworks.

“Nothing can excuse this on Edgar's part.”

"But I am really alarmed, Helen," said Adelaide, "I feel that some accident has happened to Edgar."

"Now don't imagine such things, dear," said Helen, much more cheerfully than she really felt. "You know, Adelaide, you are always having presentiments and dreams, and nothing ever comes of them."

Adelaide started up with a cry, her face the picture of alarm.

"My dream—my dream!" she cried, in a piercing voice. "Oh, why couldn't I have remembered sooner? The face in my dream was Hanna Dexter's face! I recognized it from the first, but I could not remember where I had seen it. My dream was a warning; I was mad to disregard it, and oh, what a fool that I could not remember sooner!"

"Adelaide, for Heaven's sake, be sensible," interrupted Helen, "the woman in your dream called herself Edgar's wife——"

"And how do I know she wasn't? There was something between them—her strange manner of late—Edgar's extraordinary aversion to her, and anxiety that I should dismiss her, and now his non-appearance. There is some mystery here, Helen, and that woman is at the bottom of it, believe me."

"Many women were in love with Edgar, Adelaide—women of all positions—this may have been some girl who was mad enough to fall in love with him and follow him to his home. It is possible——"

"I am going home this minute," announced Adelaide.

"That is impossible, dear—there is no train now till morning."

And until morning they sat by the window, occasionally exchanging a brief remark, but each too much absorbed in her own thoughts for anything like connected conversation.

By the first train the two unhappy girls, accompanied by Colonel Dangerfield, returned to the home they had left on the previous morning in such different spirits."

"Why do people look at us so?" said Adelaide, when they left the cars at Dangerfield station. "I know something terrible has happened."

They found their carriage still at the livery stable where

they had left it, for the coachman had not come, as he had been ordered: and with a heart filled with forebodings Colonel Dangerfield handed the ladies into the carriage, and took his place to drive them home.

They saw the ruins of their home from a far distance, but they drove resolutely on, hoping there was nothing worse to mourn than loss of property.

Dangerfield mansion lay a smoldering heap of charred wood and ashes; and several of the servants who had but that moment returned from their festivities of the day before, stood about helplessly weeping and wringing their hands. At sight of the bereaved family their lamentations redoubled, and it was some time before Colonel Dangerfield learned the full extent of his calamity.

At last a rough but kindly neighbor said, in a low voice:

“Your son’s body lies in my house, sir—we have cared for it as well as we could.”

Colonel Dangerfield’s head dropped upon his breast, and he will never raise it again in the old, proud manner peculiar to him.

Adelaide caught the words, and shrieked out in a voice of agony:

“He is dead—my Edgar is dead!”

Helen dropped in a faint, without a word or moan; but Adelaide seemed to have gone mad. She rent her garments and tore her hair, beating her breast and crying aloud:

“ parted from him in anger—oh, why was I so cold? He kissed me and I would not look at him! Wretch that I am, what shall I do? I can never ask him now to forgive me!”

It was all the women could do to quiet her and keep her from doing herself some bodily harm; and when she saw the dead body of the man she still called her husband, the scene was still worse. The body of Elise had been found a couple of hundred feet distant from that of Edgar; and neither were burned nor mutilated. The shock from the explosion and the fall had apparently caused instant death.

On the following day, after both bodies had been prepared for the grave, the woman who had dressed the body of Elise came to Adelaide and told her of the finding of the late wait-

ing-maid, dead, and suddenly killed at the same time with Edgar Dangerfield.

“This paper I found on the young woman, ma’am; and this book in her pocket. I don’t know what they be, for I can’t read, an’ I wouldn’t show ’em to anyone till you had seen ’em first, ma’am.”

Adelaide thanked the woman and rewarded her for her care; and took the paper and the book.

With a strange thrill of apprehension, she examined them both as soon as she was left alone.

The paper was the marriage certificate of Elise Morel and Edgar Dangerfield.

The book was called “Hanna Dexter’s Jcurnal.”

When Adelaide had finished reading them, she seemed turned to marble. She carried them to Colonel Dangerfield, and their interview was long and painful. The immediate result was that Mrs. Dangerfield’s husband and Mrs. Dangerfield’s maid were buried side by side. The public was much scandalized by this act; and still more so by Mrs. Dangerfield’s preemptory refusal to attend her husband’s funeral.

[THE END.]

MY REBELLION.

CHAPTER I.

It was the proverbial last straw that caused it. And a straw, to my way of thinking, of very formidable dimensions.

"Alfred," my uncle had said, "just step into my private office a minute. I desire seriously to speak with you. Thank you. Now we are quite to ourselves. Have you ever thought of getting married!"

The unusual question was startling; the studiously suave manner perplexed me; but the question, like an electric shock, paralysed my limbs and my power of utterance. I simply stood and gasped. I dare say to a spectator my bewilderment would have seemed not a little ridiculous. But I could not help it.

"Have you ever thought of marrying?" my uncle repeated with the slightest possible tinge of impatience in his tone.

It was incumbent upon me to reply. However blank my ignorance of what was intended by the inquisition, I must find words in which to answer.

Now, in itself, the problem was not a difficult one. Where is the young man who has attained the matured wisdom of three-and-twenty years without dreams of love—and of love centered in a home—repeatedly crossing his horizon? But if I committed myself to only a monosyllabic affirmative, I might be pressed further.

I had a secret, in common with one of the sweetest and loveliest maidens of my Trelford home, that no strategy should at this stage unveil to the calculating ears of Josiah Sutton. So I took refuge in an evasion.

"I expect I'm pretty much like the rest, sir," I said.

“Ideas are bound to come, whether any heed is paid to them or not.”

“Just so,” the old man answered; “and in this case I’ve got an idea to give you which you’ll certainly find it to your advantage to accept. As matters stand, it is time you had a wife. I’ve found one for you.”

Again I was stunned into temporary silence. Was I to be at my relative’s mercy in the most momentous contract of any man’s life? Did duty bid me to marry whom he pleased, and to give up Dorothy Field?

The latter thought sent back the blood in a wild current to my whitened cheeks, and made my pulses beat fast and furious—I could hear them, like smothered drums. It supplied me with resolution.

“I am afraid, sir, I shall not be able to consent,” I stammered.

“Why, have you any romantic objections to entering the ‘holy estate,’ as the parsons term it?”

The sneer in his speech deepened into a scowl upon his countenance.

“No—o, but there is an obstacle.”

“Some boy and girl attachment, perhaps. Don’t be a fool over this business, my lad. The making of hasty vows often leads to a repentance more leisurely than comfortable. It’s all rubbish, every syllable of jargon the novelists and rhymesters talk about love in a cottage, and so forth. Try to bring up a family on a hundred a year and you’ll know it. Don’t you go and believe them, and toss overboard a fortune for the sake of a pretty face and a musical voice. Let your vision extend to the tins of Australian mutton. If some Brentport damsel has betwitched you, take my advice and cut her adrift.”

He leaned across his desk as he concluded, and looked me straight in the eyes. He seemed proud of his unwonted flow of eloquence, and evidently considered it convincing. He was quickly undeceived.

“I cannot turn traitor so easily, sir,” I replied hotly.

It was useless to deny his leading accusation, and unnecessary to enlighten him as to how wide of the mark had been his guess of locality.

The old autocrat's brows grew blacker than I ever remembered to have seen them. His clenched fist rose and fell on the blotting-pad as though it were my head he was hammering and wisdom were difficult of insertion in any milder fashion.

"If you can be obstinate, so can I," he said; "I'll allow you till to-morrow morning to think matters over. If then you decline to come to terms, to fall in with the proposals I intended to make, our bargain is at an end. You may wed your Joan and go to Hanover with her for all I care."

He turned to his *Gazette*, and thus abruptly closed the interview. I went back into the counting-house with feelings of anger, doubt, and dread struggling within my breast.

My brain was so bewildered that the columns of figures I had previously been checking danced on the light-blue page, and might have been Egyptian hieroglyphics for all the coherence they possessed.

Yet I detected shuffling footsteps down the passage, and from the smirk on Philip Renbow's face was confident that the senior clerk had been a clandestine listener to every word.

By a rupture between my uncle and me he would probably be the chief gainer. I almost hated him for his hardly suppressed glee.

A troublesome decision lay before me now. Pain in any case I must suffer; pain in one event I must inflict.

Josiah Sutton was the single rich man of our family; and, occupying that high position of honor, aspired to be the dictator of all beneath him. I am bound to add that the sycophancy of those who cast longing eyes upon his wealth did much to foster his tyranny. I was the son of one of his poorest sisters, and had been adopted when I left school in an impulse of sudden charity. For years it had been tacitly understood that I was to inherit his business, and at least a considerable share of his capital. Over me he had quarrelled with his brothers, and had strnck the pair of them out of his will. All the years I had lived with him the yoke of a strict obedience had been enforced. His will had been my law indoors and out, in our social relations, in the domestic arrangements, in the routine of the

counting-house. Many times submission had sadly galled my unruly spirit. But messages from Trelford had consistently urged it upon me and for my mother's sake I yielded. Now, a crisis of far different nature had arrived. The future happiness of two hearts was at stake.

"Well, Alfred, what resolution have you arrived at?" asked my uncle at the breakfast-table next morning. I could see by his manner that he expected surrender, as of yore.

"I have not been able to alter, sir," I replied, huskily. A tremor was at my heart which caused the spoon I held to clatter wildly against the empty coffee-cup.

The dreaded sternness came back. The lines of his lips hardened, and his words slipped from between them with a crisp, deliberate utterance, like the telling out of coin.

"You are fully aware what that statement implies?"

"That I am to leave, I think you said."

"Yes," in a voice of thunder, with a sardonic chuckle at the end, "as soon as you like, or probably a great deal sooner. Make your own way in the world, my fine fellow! Experience will teach you."

"I am sorry, uncle——" I commenced.

He cut my attempted and painfully rehearsed exculpation woefully short. He rose from his chair.

"That is quite enough," he said; "you have chosen your own path and must walk in it. No maudlin sentimentalism will be of the least use. I can't waste time by listening to it."

An hour later I was sent on an errand to the post-office, and in my haste and preoccupation I ran full tilt against Mr. Frank Gowing, the chief partner of the house immediately adjoining my uncle's. Josiah Sutton & Co. (the Co. having been a phantom for years), and Gowing and Gowing, were the two largest shipping firms in all Brentport.

"Whatever's amiss, lad? Surely such a trivial accident as this hasn't made you like a chalked board?"

Was I so pale? I wondered.

"I'm dismissed, sir," I answered.

"Eh? Nothing wrong, I hope?"

"No, sir; not in the sense you mean," and then, somehow,

I found myself telling the whole story. It was lucky for me that I did tell it.

The kind-hearted old merchant just pursed his lips together, and emitted a significant "Whew!"

"Then you'll be wanting employment?" he said.

"Very shortly, sir."

"If Mr. Sutton doesn't relent."

"There's no chance of that."

"I'm afraid not, at present. We're a clerk short. Will you join our staff, Taylor?"

Light had come into my darkness much sooner than I expected. I assented with a really cheerful alacrity, and with many thanks.

CHAPTER II.

I WAS soon busy in my new quarters, and found the work at least as light as it had been with my uncle. I suited too, and quickly slipped into a position of confidence. Perhaps the romance of the episode appealed to some fellow-feeling in Mr. Frank Gowing's heart, and as he favored me I rose, and the dream of an alliance with Dorothy Field began to take more and more definite shape.

It was the beginning of June, and the classic race at Epsom had just been run. I was no sportsman, and never risked a guinea upon horseflesh in my life. But several amongst my acquaintances did, and as this year the blue ribbon had come in possession of a rank outsider, these were badly bitten. I condoled with one, Edward Quelch, as dexterously as I knew how.

"Bah! yours is fair-weather philosophy—there's a lot of that knocking about in the world," he replied with a wry grimace; "if your elegant phrasing concerning the 'fortune of war,' would only put back the gold into my purse it'd be more to the purpose. Never mind, if rumor tells the truth for once, your old office chum has got it half-a-dozen times as hot."

"What, Philip Renbow!" I ejaculated.

"Yes; did you think he was as innocent as he looks? You should have recollected the proverb, "'Tis the demure cat that steals the cream.'"

In truth, I was less surprised than possibly my manner seemed to show. A sinister report or two had reached my ears before. But how astonished and dismayed my uncle would be by the receipt of such intelligence! He had a blind unreasoning faith in the steadiness and respectability of his senior clerk. He would almost as soon have suspected himself of "plunging," as Philip Renbow.

"What has he lost? Do you know the figure?" I enquired.

"Over five hundred, I heard. He backed the second favorite very heavily on supposed private information—a dreadful sell for the lot of us."

"How on earth will he be able to pay?"

"Can't imagine. I'm told he was in Queer-street before."

"Very likely. He borrowed a five-pound note of me once."

"He'll borrow of his master now, perhaps."

I smiled. The idea of staid Josiah Sutton helping anybody out of turf difficulties was absurd.

"He'd be puzzled to manage that, I expect."

All that afternoon the story to which I had listened haunted me. In the intervals of counting-house routine the question continually recurred. How would Philip Renbow meet his so-called "debts of honor?" And another question also: If the disclosure came, would my uncle dismiss him?

Business was at that season very pressing with Gowing and Gowing, and Mr. Frank had once or twice asked me to stay and continue work in his private room during part of the evening. As I was well paid for any such extra tasks I did not mind at all. I was left to myself—to lock up at the end of the sitting, and take the key indoors. On this occasion I was specially invited to linger, and readily consented. ¶

I had a huge sheaf of letters and orders to endorse, and to index, and it was late before the last was reached.

Then, with a sigh of relief, I closed my desk and turned down the gas. As usual I went to the window to see that the fastenings were safe. There, I was riveted to the spot by sheer consternation,

The narrow, dust-begrimed casement overlooked one corner of my uncle's counting-house; and, to my surprise, gas was burning there too. In all my experience of that office I had never known a light used on a summer's evening. What could it portend! Wherein could lie the unwonted cause?

I stood beside the half-drawn blind and watched. For some moments I could detect no movement of any sort in the apartment; and if the blaze had wavered at all, or had appeared intermittent, I should have thought of fire. But as my eyes gradually became accustomed to the intervening glass I could plainly make out a shadow swaying to and fro between the desks.

The form answerable for that shadow must be engaged in the corner occupied by the old merchant's safe. From the position of the gas and of the indistinct outline I could easily prove that.

If it should be merely Josiah Sutton assuring himself at this abnormally advanced hour of the security of some particular bonds or documents, all might be right. If not, I was convinced treachery was at work.

At last the mysterious visitant to my uncle's office crossed the limited area open to my view; and I recognized Philip Renbow. He held in his hand what my quickened senses determined to be a file.

My gravest suspicions were at once confirmed. I was the accidental spectator of a crime. The ruined gambler was in very truth toiling hard and risking much, in order to meet his deficit with his employer's money. No doubt he calculated on his years of approved service, and on the unhesitating confidence so long reposed in him, to ward off the faintest vapor of suspicion. If he could only get fairly away with the spoil all would be well. And this, in a very few minutes, he would do, if no interference came. If he was to be checkmated action must be taken instantly.

Necessity is a wonderful sharpener of wits, and my brain had soon conceived a plan. The room I was now standing in, and my uncle's counting-house, both looked out on a tiny court-yard, at right angles to the thoroughfare. It was

this fact that probably gave the thief some sense of leisure and security in his scandalous undertaking.

He knew that from the road he would be unobserved. It also supplied me with a ready resource. I could slip round to my uncle's front door and alarm him without disturbing Renbow. I should have to find my way through Mr. Gowing's house, and might provoke comment, but after-explanation would be easy and my excuse undeniable.

This was the course I adopted. I made no pretence of even waiting to give up my key. I believe I actually flew down those flights of stairs and along those passages. I knew my uncle sat late, and hoped to find him up. I was not disappointed.

"Why, Alfred Taylor, whatever—what do you mean by this invasion, sir?" the old man asked, too bewildered to find coherent words; and he rose to his feet and eyed the poker as though he feared I might be mad and meditating assault.

"You are being robbed, sir," I gasped.

That dispelled for the time both his tremor and his rising indignation. He became once more the alert, collected man of business.

"How? In the office or in the house? Explain," he said.

"A burglar is at this moment in your counting-house, sir. I saw him from Mr. Gowing's private room."

Josiah Sutton meditated a moment.

"You have not alarmed the villain?"

"No, sir."

I held my peace as to the scoundrel's identity.

"The Union Jack Inn, at the corner, is still open. Run up there and get assistance. We'll take the gentleman, booty and all."

I obeyed, and returned with half-a-dozen men.

We hemmed in our victim in the most systematic fashion that could possibly have been devised. No single avenue of escape remained, and then my uncle insisted on leading the way.

"If there's any danger it shall fall to my share," he said. I honored him for his bravery.

But there was no resistance. Never did I see a guilty wretch look more corpse-like, or cower into more abject paroxysms of terror.

“Philip Renbow!” cried my uncle, in tones of stern surprise. “You of all men! After this I’ll trust nobody.”

But he did. For, at the conclusion of the trial that remitted his sometime senior clerk to the courtesies of prison warders for a couple of years, he called me aside.

“My lad,” he said, “you have saved me at any rate a thousand pounds in hard cash, and I ought to repay you. Come back and take Renbow’s place. Things shall be—as you like them, even if you won’t marry Miss Dorothy Field.”

“Miss Dorothy Field!” I echoed.

“Aye,” with a touch of the old sharpness; “who else do you suppose I meant you to wed?”

It was evident now that a game of cross-purposes had most unwittingly been played.

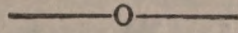
“Why, uncle,” I answered, “Dorothy and I have been engaged—only it was a secret—for fifteen months or more.”

The old shipowner first stared, then mopped his face with his bandana handkerchief (it was a hot July), then burst into the heartiest and most prolonged guffaw of, surely, his whole life.

And that was the end of my rebellion.

[THE END.]

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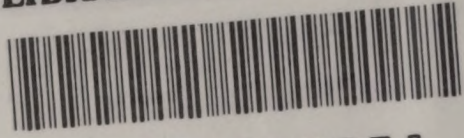
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